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SOUTHWOLD.

SOUTHWOLD:

A Novel.

"——— Semita certè
Tranquillæ per virtutem patet unica vitæ."

JUV. SAT. X.

"Tout mortel est donc né pour suffrir."

Oreste—VOLTAIRE.

BY

MRS. LILLIE DEVEREUX UMSTED.

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MRS. S. E. DEVEREUX,

MY

HONORED MOTHER,

THIS BOOK

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

SOUTHWOLD.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

" Stassi l'avaro sguardo in sè raccolto,
E i tesori d'amore e i suoi nasconde,
Dolce color di rosè in quel vel volto,
Fra l' avorio si sparge e si confonde,
Ma nella bocca ond esce ama amorosa
Sola roseggia e semplice la rosa."

La Gerusalemme.—TASSO.

" Fool that I am, to place my heart so ill! "

Dido to Æneas.—DRYDEN.

A PRIVATE parlor in a city boarding-house, at four o'clock of a dull March afternoon.

It was a small room, with a plain carpet on the floor, and a large sofa occupying nearly the whole of one side. In front of this was a table, upon which were scattered several books and the papers of the day, while in the centre stood a vase, containing a beautiful bouquet of greenhouse flowers; opposite was an open piano, and this with two or three chairs completed the furniture.

The windows at unequal distances each side the chimney were inexpensively curtained, and the shades drawn down so darkened the room, that the principal light in it seemed to come from a cheerful coal fire glowing in the grate. On the whole there was an air of comfort about the apartment, but this was owing less to the elegance of its contents than to their judicious and tasteful arrangement.

As the hands of a large old-fashioned watch, which, supported in a handsome stand on the mantel, supplied the place of a clock, pointed to a quarter past four, the door of an adjoining bedroom opened, and a young girl entered the parlor.

Medora Fielding was just nineteen, in all the power and glory of perfect health and magnificent beauty. She was slightly above the medium height; of a figure, which, though lithe and slender, was faultlessly round in the graceful curves of its outlines. Her face was perfect in its oval, with a straight, delicately-formed nose, whose exquisitely chiselled nostril indicated at once high spirit and pure blood. Her mouth, although beautifully formed, was a trifle too voluptuous in its full ripeness of lip, yet you might watch it for hours, ever entranced by its wonderful power of varying expression. Her eyes were large, and so heavily veiled by their long dark lashes, that it was only when they were fixed upon you with earnest steadiness of look that you realized they were not black, but clear lustrous blue. Her complexion was dazzlingly fair and pure, and ever fleeting in its color. Habitually the smooth cheek was tinged only with a faint blush, but this, changing in accordance with the emotions of the moment, would deepen into a

rich crimson, or fade into snowy whiteness. This almost faultless face was encircled by a wealth of sunny ringlets, which surrounded it like the golden frame of a beautiful picture.

Her dress, of rich dark blue, although inexpensive in material, had that indescribable air of style, which is given by exquisite fit and the last fashion. A delicate perfume pervaded the atmosphere around her, which seemed to emanate from every fold of her robe and every wave of her luxuriant hair.

She crossed the room with a quick elastic step, and glanced at the watch.

"A quarter-past four!" she exclaimed, "and Walter not yet come."

She turned away impatiently, walked to one of the windows, and drew up the shade. The outside prospect was by no means a charming one; only a dreary waste of low roofs beneath, and the dull leaden sky above.

"Nothing there to cheer me," she said despondently. "How weary I am of this wretched room and this circumscribed view."

She left the window, and began restlessly to pace the floor. "But where is Walter? We have not met for a week, and yet he is allowing this only hour which we could pass alone together, to slip away, moment by moment. How I wish he was here." She sighed heavily, but an instant after her whole expression changed as she caught the sound of an approaching footfall. "Hark!" she exclaimed, "that is his step on the stair. Come in."

As the words died on her lips, Walter Lascelles entered the room. He was perhaps twenty-three years old, but

he looked even younger from the effeminate delicacy of his complexion. His figure, although tall and well-made, was unusually stout for so young a man. His face was handsome from its regularity of feature, and possessed a certain degree of intelligence and amiability of expression, notwithstanding the heavy sensuality of his mouth, and the restless and often sinister glances of his cold blue eyes.

As he advanced eagerly towards Medora a bright smile broke over her face that chased away every trace of sadness, and rendered it bewitchingly beautiful.

"At last!" she said, as she placed her hand in his.

"Yes, darling! though I thought I never would be able to leave the office. When I was released, you may be sure I almost ran all the way here, lest I should be too late."

Medora withdrew her hand and seated herself on the sofa, as she said, "Always good at excuses, Walter; you remind me of an old saying of my school teachers, 'people who are good at excuses, are good at nothing else.'"

"Not quite so bad as that, I hope," replied Lascelles, gaily, though a crimson flush overspread his face at the sarcasm.

"Seriously, Walter, it happens too often that you neglect your appointments with me. I may be too exacting, perhaps, I have been spoiled," she added, with charming coquetry, "but I scarcely believe you love me, when you are so reluctant to see me alone."

"It is not that, but really I am so busy—"

"Too old an apology," interrupted Medora quickly, for

she was hurt by the coldness of his tone and expression, when she had expected a passionate protestation in reply. "You know the old verse—

"'A laggard in love . . . .'

you remember the remainder of the line?"

"No, I do not. What is it?"

"You won't be angry if I tell you?"

"How could I be with you, dearest?"

"Well, then,

"'A dastard in war.'"

"You are too bad, Medora," said Lascelles, with another angry flush.

She saw that he was hurt, and her womanly heart, which had been longing to forgive him, was touched. Perhaps, too, her vanity was gratified that she had roused his feelings and satisfied herself of her power. She replied, in a softened tone, and with exquisite tenderness:

"You promised not to be angry."

"I said it would be impossible with you, and so it is, darling." Lascelles was fond of lavishing terms of endearment on any woman with whom he was intimately thrown, but this was his favorite one, and long afterwards, when he had used it thoughtlessly to a score of beauties, Medora could never hear that word "darling" without a desperate thrill at her heart. Now it touched her as it always did, and she held out her hand to him. Just as he raised it to his lips, a step was heard approaching the door.

"There's mamma," exclaimed Medora, quickly; and Lascelles had only time to leave the sofa and take a chair, before Mrs. Fielding came in. She was a small, thin woman, with a face still possessing the traces of beauty, though disfigured by a look of ill health and peevishness.

She greeted Lascelles coldly; for in her eyes his poverty was almost a crime. He fully understood her feelings towards him, and therefore, after a few commonplace civilities, rose to go.

"May I ask where those beautiful flowers came from, Miss Medora?" he said, half aside.

"Mr. Claude Hamilton sent them this morning," replied Medora.

"By the way he is going abroad soon,—is he not?"

"Yes; he sails in the next steamer."

"I am glad of it," said Lascelles, in a significant undertone, as he bowed over her hand.

The door had scarcely closed upon him, when Mrs. Fielding exclaimed fretfully: "Really, Medora, I do wish you would not let that tiresome Lascelles come here so often."

"But I don't think he is tiresome, mamma."

"No, I dare say not; neither does Lucy Wentworth, I suppose."

At this name the bright look which had rested on Medora's face ever since her lover left, suddenly vanished, and she asked hastily, "Why do you say that?"

"Then he did not tell you he has been driving with her all the afternoon, in the new carriage her father gave her at Christmas."

Every vestige of color left Medora's cheek as she

heard these words, and a conviction of the falsehood of Lascelles's excuse flashed across her; but she said steadily, "Are you sure it was he?"

"Yes, perfectly certain. I saw them first more than an hour ago, when I was on Mrs. Clarkson's step. They were driving up Fifth Avenue then; and on my way home I passed opposite Mr. Wentworth's, just as Lascelles was helping Lucy out at the door. You should have seen the air with which he did it."

"I have no doubt I should have been amused," said Medora, coldly, as her mother rose to leave the room. But when she was alone, and free from all restraint, her indignant passion found vent in impetuous words.

"Another falsehood! Why can he not be true, even if he is no longer faithful? This is not the first time he has wilfully sought to deceive me. Oh! how I wish I could despise him, as he deserves."

There was a passionate energy in her voice, as she murmured these last words; yet a moment after, when her mother joined her, she had banished every trace of emotion, and only that she was a shade paler than usual, there was nothing to indicate that their last conversation had been of more than ordinary interest.

Oh! wonderful faculty that we possess of suppressing all outward signs of feeling, however powerful. Were it not so, would not our countenances be for ever distorted with the anguish of unhappiness and disappointment. Do you think because your *vis-à-vis* at dinner has a smile on his face, that his heart smiles also?

Mrs. Fielding made no further allusion to a subject which she half suspected pained her daughter more than she chose to allow. Indeed, all further conversation

was for the time prevented by the dinner-hour and the gong. That horror of modern hotels began its hideous groaning: at first a low rumbling like distant thunder, increasing in waves of sound till the whole house was full of the intolerable noise. Small thanks to the man who first suggested the idea that the ladies and gentlemen of the civilized western world should be called to their meals by the barbaric music that summons to battle the uncouth hordes of the Celestial kingdom.

CHAPTER II.

"Après une carême ennuyeux
Grâce à Dieu, voici la Semaine
Des divertissements pieux."

ROUSSEAU.

"On peut changer d'amant, mais non changer d'epoux."

CORNEILLE.

CAPTAIN RICHARD FIELDING, Medora's father, was a brave soldier and a gallant gentleman. He was well known and widely beloved among his brother officers, and there was many a heart-felt sigh of regret when the news came of his death by a malignant fever, that decimated the distant post at which he was stationed. He had married some five years previously the then reigning belle of New York—Miss Annie Clinton, and his last moments were embittered by the thought that he should leave her and his little daughter almost penniless. The slender pittance of the pension was indeed poor and insufficient for the maintenance of the widow and the education of her little girl, and had it not been for the death shortly after of one of Mrs. Fielding's brothers, of whose estate she received her portion, their situation would have been indeed deplorable. Even as it was, their annual income was so small, that from her earliest childhood Medora had been accustomed to the desperate

struggle of striving to keep up appearances upon limited means. She had never known the happy retirement of a home, so essential to the proper development of character, especially to a girl; but with her mother had journeyed from one hotel or boarding-house to another, always endeavoring to unite the greatest amount of show with the least possible expense, at no matter what sacrifice of comfort.

Upon Mrs. Fielding the effects of this life had been peculiarly unfortunate. Her health had failed utterly years ago, and this from no positive disease in the first instance, but from an entire neglect of the most ordinary sanitary rules. Improper food, irregular hours, and above all, total want of exercise, had at last developed in her system disorders serious enough to form an excuse for her becoming a hopeless hypochondriac. With ill-health came its frequent accompaniment, excessive nervousness and irritability, so that her daughter had never found in her an agreeable companion or a sympathizing friend.

Medora was endowed by nature with a combination of qualities not often met with in her sex. Her mind had a rare breadth and scope; indeed, it was almost masculine in its depth of thought and capability of analytical inquiry. This power is always dangerous to its possessor, but doubly so, when that possessor is a woman. It is difficult for one so gifted to take anything on trust. Every proposition must be absolutely demonstrated before it is accorded full belief. As with most of the doctrines of a religious creed this is clearly impossible, it is but too frequently the case that it leads to fearful scepticism, if not to set-

tled infidelity, and with women far more than with men is implicit faith absolutely necessary to happiness.

In the instance of Medora, accustomed all her life to pay religion the respect of outward observance of its requirements, she had as yet given but little serious thought to the unknown and illimitable future that stretches in fearful uncertainty beyond the gates of death. She was young, vigorous, and full of animal spirits, and no great sorrow had as yet crossed her path. How will it be when her hour of trial comes—will she find consolation in the peace which the world cannot take away, or will she sink into utter and hopeless unbelief?

From her father Medora had inherited a rare fascination and grace of manner, and the most dauntless courage. She had a pride, too, indomitable for either physical or moral cowardice, and you felt when you caught the light that sometimes flashed from her eyes that no power of circumstances could ever wholly overwhelm that brave spirit. Yet with this she had the passion of a true woman for all the elegancies and luxuries that can gratify the senses. What wonder, then, that she loathed this perpetual struggle with poverty, and that she regarded wealth as the one great good of life.

Mrs. Fielding's connexion with some of the first families of New York had rendered Medora's *début* a brilliant one, and it was not surprising that she had come to consider the obtaining a rich husband as the end and aim of all her triumphs. Behold her then at eighteen the reigning belle of the city, glorying in vigorous health, a magnificent animal organization, and superb beauty.

During this season she had met Walter Lascelles, and

from the first, unworthy as he was, there was that about him that fascinated her irresistibly. His very effeminacy was pleasing to one of so strong a character, and it was not long before she discovered that her attachment to him would form the one grand passion of her life. He was not rich, yet for his sake she would willingly brave poverty; of an obscure New England family, yet for him she would resign all hopes of a brilliant alliance. He was of course struck with her wonderful beauty; and when he saw that she, for whom half the young men of the city sighed in vain, evidently accorded him a preference, his vanity was flattered, and his sensual nature roused into a love as deep as it was possible for him to feel. But poor, and craving money, not for what it would purchase but with a sordid lust, and by far too indolent ever to earn even a competence, he felt it absolutely necessary that he should bring his personal advantages into the matrimonial market, and, if possible, give them in exchange for wealth. Yet, urged on by passion, he drew from Medora an avowal of her love, and himself plighted his faith in return, though exacting a promise of the strictest secresy. And she, usually so clear-sighted in the motives of others, in this instance, where she needed all her penetration, was hopelessly blind.

Ah! why is it that women of intellect are so rarely happy in their loves! That since those old days, when Sappho sighed in vain for Phaon, their very brilliancy has seemed to render them all the more easily deceived, until, with crushed hearts, they are ready to exclaim, Would God, I had been born a fool!

Fancying Lascelles to possess all the qualities which

she had painted in her beau-ideal, Medora dreamed that he would achieve wealth and distinction, and was willing to wait years, confident they should yet be happy. Of course, with her heart full of this passion, she regarded other suits as mere annoyances. Notwithstanding all her mother could urge she rejected several brilliant offers of marriage, until Mrs. Fielding, suspecting that Lascelles was the obstacle to any other preference, determined to break up his intimacy with her daughter. Any effort on her part, however, was not necessary.

For some time previous to this period he had ceased to speak of the future, and although quite as ardent when with Medora, his visits were less frequent. More than once she had heard the name of Lucy Wentworth associated with his in a way that at first filled her with surprise, and then, as we have seen, with despairing indignation.

Two weeks had passed since the afternoon that Medora had first received convincing proof of the falsehood and treachery of Lascelles, and during that time she had never seen him. In vain she strove to excuse his neglect in a thousand different ways, and dwelt upon each look and word of their last meeting to assure herself of his continued affection. She heard of him almost daily as devoted to Lucy Wentworth from her gay young friends, none of whom suspected her secret engagement. Rendered almost desperate by this confirmation of her worst fears, and feeling that her own dignity demanded an explanation of his conduct, she made the most strenuous efforts to see him—but in vain. The abrupt entrance of her mother at that last interview had prevented her

from making any agreement for the future; and although she had, at the risk of breaking every other appointment, remained at home each afternoon at the hour which had been that of his usual visits, he had not called.

Those were indeed wretched days to Medora,—those mornings when after an early breakfast she hastened into the street in the vain hope of seeing him on his way to his office, and when after a weary walk she would return home tired and dispirited, although almost always accompanied by some admirer whose lively small talk was but an aggravation of her disappointment. Or worse than these, those evenings when she would listen with eager ears for the well known footsteps that never came, until, as the moments slipped away and the hour when they could come drew near its close, she would pace the room like a caged tigress, with a fierce impatient longing to throw aside all the restraints of her sex, and seek out that false lover who would not come to her.

The whole of this fortnight was in Lent, and the last half of it Passion Week, so that there was no opportunity of seeing Lascelles at any of the ordinary haunts of fashionable gaiety. But at last this was over, and the Easter sun rose brilliant and beautiful over the earth. The following night there was to be a party at the house of a mutual acquaintance, and Medora was sure that she should there meet Lascelles. Full of this thought, she had spent the whole of this Sunday, which should be one of calm religious joy, in wishing the lagging hours away. Yet blame her not too severely. Wounded vanity, insulted pride, and outraged affection—those are hard things to bear. What wonder, then, if even this glorious festival brought no peace or comfort to her, and that she

chafed with impatience during services that wearied her and prayers in which she could not join.

Even when time is most leaden-winged he accomplishes his flight, and at last Monday evening came. It was a brilliant opening of the spring season, that ball at Mrs. Le Roy Clarkson's. She was a gay married woman, fond of clustering around her fair young girls, and Medora, as the fairest of them all, was the especial favorite. On this occasion she had insisted that she should come early to aid her in receiving her guests. The first embrace of those two women was a pretty sight. Mrs. Clarkson, a handsome brunette gorgeous with velvet and diamonds, and Medora, a pure Saxon blonde in a floating dress of some thin white material, her golden locks wreathed with starry blue flowers. At that moment the contrast between them was striking as that which the Count of France once saw when the magnificent Catharine de Medici and the graceful Marie Stuart stood side by side, before the unrivalled charms of the youthful Queen of Scots had been clouded by the first of those overwhelming sorrows which were even then darkening over her sad future.

It must not be supposed that the sufferings of the past fortnight had dimmed the lustre of Medora's loveliness. No,—there was a glowing color in her cheek and a bright flash in her eye that might be the result of excitement and pride, but rendered her dazzlingly beautiful. Neither was she so absorbed in her secret sorrow as to be unable to bear her part in a sprightly conversation, as you will hear if you listen to the chat of the two ladies.

Mrs. Clarkson.—"It is only half past nine. Come, let us sit down and have a talk before any one comes."

MEDORA, seating herself.—"I came early on purpose to enjoy that pleasure, but where is Mr. Clarkson?"

MRS. C.—"Oh! the dear good man, he is not dressed yet—besides I told him he need not come in till the rooms were pretty full. You know it only bores him."

M.—"Really, Sue, I think you have the best and most good-natured husband that ever a woman was blessed with."

MRS. C., innocently.—"I agree with you perfectly, my dear, but do you know other men sometimes takes advantage of it?"

M., with affected surprise.—"You don't say so. You astonish me!"

MRS. C.—"*C'est vrai*, I assure you; why there was that horrid Tancred Biddle,—one of the Philadelphia Biddles you know—of whom, as they say there, 'there is no end from Old Nick down.'"

M., laughing.—"I remember him perfectly, but I did not think he was horrid at all; on the contrary, he struck me as being decidedly handsome."

MRS. C.—"Well, I suppose he was, but still he was shockingly impertinent; you know he used to come here sometimes!"

M.—"*Sometimes!—all* times, you mean, why every one knew how he admired you."

MRS. C.—"Oh! that's nonsense of course, but still I will tell you what happened the other day."

M.—"Do!"

MRS. C.—"Well! you see he had been here twice to dine, and each time, about half an hour after dinner, Le Roy would get up and leave the room. Not that he had anything to do, but it bored him to sit there and

hear us talk nonsense. So about a week ago, I went out to drive with Biddle, and when I came back of course I asked him to dine. In the evening, as soon as we were alone, he drew his chair very near mine, and said—

"'Your husband does not appreciate you!'

"'I assure you he does better than I deserve, but why do you say so?' said I.

"'Why,' answered he, 'I think if he did he would be horribly jealous.'

"'I am sure I don't know why he should be,' said I innocently.

"'Don't you?' asked Biddle, with a look out of his black eyes that rather alarmed me. 'Why you certainly know, if he does not, how much I admire you, dearest Sue,' and with that, do you know the wretch absolutely had the audacity to throw himself on his knees before me and try to take my hand! I hardly knew what to do. You see I *had* been rather flirting with him, and did not think the dignified would quite answer, so I ran to the door, and called Le Roy! Le Roy!

"'For God's sake, Sue!' cried Biddle, jumping up as quickly as possible, 'what are you going to do?'

"'I wish you would not call me Sue,' replied I. 'I always tell my husband everything, and I am going to tell him now—'

"'What is it, Sue?' said Le Roy, opening the library door, just at the moment.

"'Mr. Biddle is making love to me,' answered I; you should have seen the funny puzzled look in Le Roy's face. He half suspected something queer had happened, so he merely said, 'Well?'

"'The fact was, I believe, I was so stupid that at last, as no other topic would interest me, Mr. Biddle essayed love-making, but I thought, perhaps, it would amuse you to see him try it, so I called you. Will you be so kind as to proceed now, sir?" added I to Biddle, who stood by all this time looking rather foolish.

"'No, I thank you,' said he, 'I will leave Mr. Clarkson to do it now that he is here.'

"'I think that would be a better plan,' said I, taking Le Roy's hand, 'but don't be in haste to go; perhaps you would like to take a lesson in conjugal devotion.'

"'Not at present,' said he, with a look at me intended to be annihilating. But I only smiled saucily, so he bade us good evening. He left the next day for Philadelphia."

Just as the lively lady finished her story, a gentleman about forty, with a peculiarly mild and amiable face, entered the room. This was Mr. Le Roy Clarkson. After speaking to Medora, he turned to his wife.

"Do you want me now, Sue?"

"Not in the least, but you can stay if you choose. There is the bell,—now we shall soon have plenty of people here."

A moment after, as two muffled ladies passed the door, Mrs. Clarkson continued, "There are those old young ladies, the Misses Haircloth, I wonder when they will be too antique to be invited to dancing parties?"

"I suppose," said Medora, "that Miss Elvira came a little early in hopes of having an opportunity of talking to you a little about the 'Sweet Season' through which we have just passed, and the great 'gospel privileges' we have enjoyed. For my part I hate Lent."

"You shock me, Medora," said Mrs. Clarkson, with a light laugh. "*Voilà!* I believe that was young Lovelace that just went up stairs. If it was, I mean to introduce him to Miss Elvira as soon as they come down. It will be such fun to hear her lecture him."

CHAPTER III.

"My soul nor deigns nor dares complain,
Though grief and passion there rebel;
I only know we loved in vain,
I only feel farewell! farewell!"

BYRON.

MEDORA filled her post of assistant to her fascinating hostess, with every nerve braced to encounter Lascelles, without betraying emotion. It was not long before she saw Lucy Wentworth on her way to the dressing-room, and expected to see him then, but he was not with her, as a moment after she entered leaning on her father's arm. She was a graceful girl, although not exactly pretty, with mild blue eyes and soft brown hair. As Medora bent in the courtesy to her and caught a glimpse of herself in an opposite mirror, her heart swelled with the triumphant consciousness of her own superior beauty. "Can he love her, when he sees me?" she thought, forgetting that too frequently the glitter of gold outweighs the sheen of golden locks, and diamonds sparkle with a more attractive lustre than the brightest eyes.

As the father and daughter turned away, Mrs. Clarkson said to Medora—

"I suppose that engagement will be announced soon."

"Whose?" asked Medora, knowing only too well wh she was about to hear.

"Why, Lucy Wentworth and Lascelles. By-the-wa Medora, I always had a suspicion he was an admirer yours."

"Not at all," said Medora, faintly.

"Of course, that means you would not have hi Well, I am glad of it, for I don't like him. Lucy We worth is a great deal too good for him. But here comes. Good evening, Mr. Lascelles."

There was a curling smile on Medora's lip, and haughty sweep in her stately courtesy that ma Lascelles wince. He did not attempt to speak with h but hastened away to join Lucy Wentworth. S greeted him with a fond blush and smile that sooth his wounded vanity with the assurance of her devot affection. Yet, ever and anon, a passionate thrill ca over him as Medora floated by in the mazes of t waltz, a dance in which she peculiarly excelled, for s was endowed with rare grace of motion, and a foot a ankle said to be unrivalled in the city, by those w watch at ball-room doors for the occasional glimpses those mysterious charms which the dress of the d permits.

As the hours passed on, Lascelles continued perfect devoted to Lucy Wentworth, scarcely leaving her si for a moment. Something of this sort Medora h expected, but not that his attentions would be so point She was, however, too much mistress of herself to betr any jealousy. Indeed, her pride was too thorough aroused for her even to feel at the moment the f misery of her situation. She was determined he shou

not enjoy the triumph of seeing her suffer, and, therefore, jested merrily on this new engagement, which, although not yet announced, was the theme of every tongue. One thing she had fully decided—that she would speak to Lascelles. She fancied that he studiously avoided her even in the dance, but was resolved not thus to be foiled. Was she to be flung aside thus easily, like a faded flower or a broken toy, without one word of regret or explanation? No! a thousand times, no! All the evening, while apparently only occupied with amusement and wholly devoted to the partner of the moment, she was watching with eager eyes every motion of Lascelles. Yet, no opportunity of accosting him presented itself.

Supper was over, and she began to fear that he might leave without her having gained her point, when she saw him standing with a group of young men at one of the doors of the ball-room. She at once decided upon speaking to him then, confident that the very boldness of the proceeding would prevent all suspicion of the true motive of her conduct. She skilfully decoyed young Stuyvesant, who happened at the time to be her companion, towards the door, and before Lascelles was aware of her intention, addressed him suddenly.

"Mr. Lascelles, will you give me your arm for a moment? I would like to speak to you."

This was said with a smile of the utmost suavity. Of course, surrounded by young men as he was, there was no escape. He looked at her for a moment, and even he was deceived by the serenity of her countenance, as he bent with a muttered—"I shall be most happy."

Medora just rested the tips of her fingers on his arm, and with a graceful bow to the somewhat puzzled group, said as they turned away—

"You will excuse Mr. Lascelles, gentlemen. I shall not detain him long. Mr. Stuyvesant, I shall rejoin you before the waltz is over."

The hall into which they turned was almost deserted, as some of the guests had already left, and the rest were in the ball-room. A door at one end of it stood open, for the night was unusually warm for the season, and the air of the house, heated by furnace fires, as well as by two hundred palpitating dancers, was unusually oppressive. Before they had gone three steps, Medora had dropped her hold upon an arm which, light as was the pressure upon it, trembled under her hand, and led the way out on to a balcony which overhung the deserted street. The night air struck cold and damp on her bare arms and shoulders, but was powerless to chill the fierce fires that raged in her bosom. The full moon shed its pure, pale rays over the quiet city, but brought no calm to her. Long hours before, the great metropolis had sunk to sleep, and the watchman on his lonely round looked up surprised at those solitary figures. Little could he guess that in those low-spoken words, whose faint echoes scarcely reached him, a woman was resigning all the hopes that brighten the future—all the remembrances that sweeten the past. Yet, outwardly, Medora was as calmly self-possessed as if the interview she had solicited was for the purpose of making an engagement for the opera, or arranging a party of pleasure. She was the first to break the silence.

"I need not apologize to you for insisting on this

interview. You are aware that I have a right to demand an explanation of your conduct."

She paused. Was there some lingering hope that he would yet return to his former allegiance? If so, his first words undeceived her.

"Medora! I am poor. If it were not for that—"

"Enough!" she said, with haughty impatience. "You need say no more. I release you from every promise which you have ever given me."

"Do not be harsher with me than I deserve," said Lascelles, with an imploring gesture, and turning away from the fixed look of those eyes, which shone with an unearthly glitter in the moonlight.

"I do not intend to blame you," said Medora frigidly. "I have nothing to add but this: let the past be forgotten—henceforth we meet only as strangers;" with a stately bow she made a step forward, but in order to reach the door she must pass Lascelles, and with a sudden gesture he detained her, while he said—

"Oh, Medora, let us not part so coldly! For the sake of that past, bid me at least a kind farewell."

One moment's hesitation, then she calmly said, "Certainly," and held out her hand, determined, with haughty pride, that he should not have the satisfaction of thinking that she could not trust herself to permit that adieu. Lascelles looked at her earnestly. There was no relenting in that cold face, yet he raised the gloved hand, and pressed it passionately to his lips.

Medora had not been prepared for this. She started slightly, but instantly recovered her superb self-command, and with a quiet—"Good evening," swept past him into the hall. In another moment she was whirling

on the arm of her expectant partner, who little guessed what had passed in that few minutes' conversation—or, that while her feet kept time to the measure of the waltz, her brain was full of this thought: "Henceforth no more love; and since that is over, let me live only to triumph."

When the dance was done, and all necessity for exertion had ceased, Medora felt sick at heart and longed to be alone. She walked with languid steps across the now almost deserted rooms to the sofa where Mrs. Clarkson had thrown herself, worn out with the fatigues of the evening.

"Are you going, dear?" she said. "Well, I won't urge you to stay, for you really look tired. Le Roy! Medora is ready to go," for when she went out without her mother, Mr. Clarkson usually, as a safe married man, acted as her escort home, confident that his charming wife would readily obtain some other attendant.

Strange custom of society this necessity for a *chaperone*. How often do we see a gay party matronized by some wild girl, younger and more full of animal spirits than many of those under her charge, and what guarantee of propriety is there when a young husband accompanies, as guardian, some fascinating belle, leaving his pretty wife to be her own *chaperone*, during a *tête-à-tête* drive with some gallant admirer.

Only once more did Medora arouse herself, and that was when on her way to the carriage she met Miss Wentworth and Lascelles. She bowed to them with a bland smile, yet the look that flashed from her eyes as she passed, was like that with which the wronged Medea regarded Jason and Creusa when she plotted her deadly revenge.

CHAPTER IV.

"With dove-like wings peace o'er yon village broods."
The Sabbath.—GRAHAM.

"Cette lettre vous surprendra sans doute."
L'Ecole des Maris.—MOLIERE.

AMONG the many beautiful villages that lie along the Sound coast of New England, there is none more beautiful than Stratford. It rests among green meadows, on the shore of the peaceful Housatonic, where it pours its calm waters into the sea. It has wide streets, full of glorious old elms, and quaint houses looking out over neat white palings. It has a village green, where, at the foot of a low sloping hill, stand side by side the grey old church that has been the mother of our faith in the state, and the little brick school-house that has taught and sheltered the childhood of four generations. The past half century has wrought few changes there; an eternal Sabbath broods over its quiet shades; not even the rapid steps of progress as yet have disturbed its profound repose.

It is as if years ago some weird enchantress had waved her fairy wand over the lovely village, and held it in a sweet spell of perpetual tranquillity. Long may it be ere it is broken!

One bright May afternoon the sunshine that danced

on the waves and slept on the grass, fell in a broad band of radiance into the wide hall of the old Thornton house in Stratford. It came in through the quaint fanlight over the door, and glancing along the dark wainscoting, shone resplendent from the plate of the tall, old-fashioned clock, and fell in a shower of gold on the clustering curls of a child standing in front of it. She was just on the verge of womanhood, her whole attitude and figure were full of grace and refinement as she stood there in her simple calico dress, her large dark eyes fixed wistfully on the kindly face of the venerable time-piece, that for ninety years had repeated the same endless song.

"Five, ten, fifteen, twenty," whispered the little girl, and then aloud, "it's just twenty minutes and a half past five, cousin Floyd."

"Is it so late as that?" said the voice of a young man from an adjoining room, "then the mail must have been in some time, and we will go at once."

As he uttered the last words the speaker entered the hall. He was not more than twenty-two, though his full, dark beard, made him look somewhat older. His face was strikingly handsome, with soft, deep-set eyes, and a mouth of remarkable sweetness; his broad, intellectual forehead, was shaded by masses of chestnut hair, and the young Achilles had not a figure of more grace and activity. He approached his cousin with a smile that well displayed his splendid teeth.

"Are you not ashamed, Nannie, not to be able to tell time without counting; why, you are too old for that; do you know you will be fifteen next birthday?"

"Oh, cousin Floyd," exclaimed Nannie, blushing,

"did you hear me? I thought I spoke so softly that you couldn't, but it is so much easier to count," she added, apologetically.

"Well, next time try to do without it; but come, here is your hat, now let us go."

Nannie tied on the fancifully trimmed straw flat he handed her, and the two went out over the low "stoop" and gravelled walk, and up the quiet street, under the shade of the great trees now clothed in the delicate green of early spring, to the very old building which united in one small room a grocery, dry goods establishment, news dépôt, and post-office. It was a queer place that country store: the wall overhead painted of a deep blue, with the great rafters, which traversed it, hung with samples of the heterogeneous wares which could there be purchased. On one side, around a rusty stove, winter or summer, two or three of the village worthies were always to be found discussing the news of the day; the opposite space was occupied with the counter and goods of the shop; while from behind the small array of boxes, which the wants of Stratford required, the venerable postmaster, with laborious care, dispensed the few epistles which the lean mail-bag brought twice a day to his inspection.

"Anything for me, Mr. Brooks?" asked the young man, in a cheery voice.

The old gentleman glanced out, over his spectacles, and said slowly—

"Yes, Mr. Southwold."

Then selecting a letter from one of the little pigeonholes, he carefully perused the address before handing it to the expectant owner, although he knew perfectly

well that it belonged to him, from the fact that he had placed it there some half hour previously. Mr. Southwold waited good-naturedly, and took it with a polite "Thank you," as he turned away.

He broke the seal and then said, in answer to his cousin's inquiring glance—

"It is from uncle Southwold, but he is not a frequent correspondent, and it is some time since we heard from him."

He read the letter hastily, muttered to himself "Queer" as he finished it, and then added aloud to his little cousin, who still regarded him earnestly—

"You need not look so disappointed, Nannie, it shall not interfere with our walk. Which way shall we go? what do you say to Tea-party lane?"

At this her face brightened, she gave a joyous assent, and they started at the brisk pace of accomplished pedestrians, down the village street, out over the sandy road, and into the quiet path, all shady with trees, and redolent with the sweet smells of the woods, which connected two distant parts of the straggling village. It had been constructed at some remote period by the farmers of the neighborhood for the ease and accommodation of their wives and sweethearts, when they were minded to congregate together for the quiet enjoyment of a "dish of tea" and scandal.

The Thornton house was so called because, for more than three quarters of century, it had been the residence of the Thornton family, the last person of that name who held it being Mr. John Thornton. His only child, who reached maturity, was a daughter. Miss Ellen

attracted numerous suitors to quiet Stratford, and at last made a worthy choice in Mr. Henry Southwold, a young gentleman of handsome person and pleasing manners, who was established in a lucrative business in New York. He was one of two brothers, sole representatives of an old and honorable family. The elder, Floyd, so named from the Long Island house whence their lovely mother came, inherited Southwold, the old family seat, consisting of the homestead, and many noble acres on the east bank of the Hudson.

Two sons were born to Mr. Henry Southwold. The elder was called after the father; the second, Mr. Floyd Southwold, who had not yet married, earnestly requested might be named after himself, expressing it to be his fixed determination to remain a bachelor, and to adopt the boy as his own. His wish was readily complied with, though at the time the light-hearted young couple regarded it as very improbable that their handsome and wealthy brother would adhere to his resolution. When, in the course of time, Mr. John Thornton died, Mr. Henry Southwold sold the farm, which had been his principal property, only retaining the homestead, which, as it stood in the centre of Stratford, formed a pleasant country residence.

Was there anything in that beautiful summer of '36 to presage the ruin that was to come at its close? was the sunshine less bright, and the fields less green? did the brooks sparkle less merrily, and the birds sing less sweetly because they knew that when their reign was over, and the dark winter had come with his chains of ice, there would be destruction and want over the whole of our fair land? However lovingly the seasons

lingered, still the remorseless fates sped on the lagging hours, and when the year drew to its close, our young Republic was convulsed to its very heart with a fearful panic. All confidence was gone; men looked at each other with distrustful eyes: and well they might, for many of those whose names stood highest for probity and honor, were weighed in the balance, and found wanting. Commerce almost ceased; trade scarce existed: the relentless river of destruction carried all before it.

Among those mercantile houses that longest stemmed the resistless torrent, was that of "Henry Southwold & Co.," but at last that too went down. Long did the young man struggle against the pressure that was bearing him to the earth, only to sink at last all the more hopelessly. To one to whom honor was dearer than life, the blow was fatal; and after months of ceaseless, though unavailing application to business, his overtasked strength gave way, and like too many others—the victims of that great crisis—he sank into a premature grave.

The heartbroken widow, with her two little boys, sought an unostentatious asylum in her early home. Out of the wreck of the great fortune that had been hers during her happy wifehood, enough was saved for a competence. As it had never been necessary to sell the old house, she resumed possession of it. It was then that her brother-in-law, whose fortune, invested as it was in broad acres, had passed through the storm unscathed, reminded her of his promise to adopt her second son. Mrs. Southwold could hardly bring herself to contemplate this proposal, and while she was hesi-

tating its acceptance, a blow fell which for ever precluded the possibility of entertaining it.

During the first year of her residence in Stratford, she lost her first-born; while she was yet weeping over his new-made grave, Mr. Southwold urged an answer to his offer; her refusal was, perhaps, somewhat hasty, for she was hurt at what she deemed unkind haste. Whether from this, or some other cause, the offer was not renewed, although he continued to pay her his regular semi-annual visits.

So the years rolled peacefully on. Mrs. Southwold was comparatively happy; she was among the friends of her childhood, with whom she had ever been a favorite, from her unfailing kindness and benevolence. By every sick bed, and in every house of mourning, she was the gentle nurse, the tender consoler. She saw her son growing up all that her heart could desire. Yet, as time passed on, and the wealth and luxury of our country increased, she began to feel that their limited income was too small to gratify, as she would wish, his scholarly and expensive tastes. He had now been at home from college two years, and she had as yet been unable to send him to the city to complete the legal studies which he was endeavoring to pursue without assistance at home. It is true she might, through her late husband's friends, have procured him a situation in some mercantile establishment, but Floyd himself had no preference for such pursuits, and she shrank fearfully from embarking the son in the same career that had ended so disastrously for the father.

This spring, Mrs. Southwold had felt more than ever harassed, and it was a welcome relief from her own

anxious thoughts to have the society of a bright young girl like Nannie Floyd, her son's second-cousin. She was one of a large family, and always rejoiced greatly when she received an invitation to Stratford from her "dear Aunt Ellen." Although not a girl of much vigor of intellect, and in many respects childish beyond her years, she had one recommendation, which, in the eyes of so fond a mother as Mrs. Southwold, was beyond all others—her affectionate admiration for Floyd was unbounded. It sometimes crossed her aunt's mind that, now that Nannie was almost a woman, this might prove something serious; but the idea was by no means unpleasing, as she felt that in the warm-hearted and unselfish girl, her son would find a wife who would supply the tender devotion she had lavished upon him from his earliest infancy.

To a thoughtful boy like Floyd, who from his very amiability was easily influenced by those around him, the companionship of a woman of his mother's cultivated mind and strong energy of character was invaluable. It had assisted greatly in making him what he was, a man of refined tastes, gentle manners, and profound scholarship.

Mrs. Southwold sat this afternoon at the window of a small parlor, which was furnished without much expense yet with the most exquisite taste. Her busy fingers were occupied with some embroidery—a favorite amusement, for in all the feminine accomplishments of the needle her skill was famous. She was still a handsome woman, although her figure had lost somewhat of its early grace in the comfortable plumpness of middle life. Her very fine hair and teeth made her look many years younger than she really was, yet the true charm of her countenance

was in its mild and benevolent expression and the clear light of her kindly eyes.

She looked up from her work, when the gate opened on the return of the cousins from their walk, greeting them with a bright smile and a friendly nod.

"I have a letter from Uncle Southwold," said Floyd as he entered the room.

"Well, what does he say?"

"It is rather peculiar. I will read it if you like."

"Certainly," replied his mother, and Floyd began as follows:

"*Southwold*, May 15th, 185–

"My dear Nephew

"It has doubtless sometimes surprised you that you have never received an invitation to visit me here. My reasons for that apparent discourtesy it is now time that I explain. You are perhaps not aware that when I desired that you should receive my name I coupled the request with the promise that I would one day adopt you as my heir.

"Of that agreement I was not unmindful, and many years ago proposed to fulfil it, but just at that time your elder brother died, and your mother thought fit peremptorily to decline the offer. I have never renewed it, as I considered myself, by that action, absolved from my pledge. Prevented from directing your education myself, I waited to see what you were likely to become. I have watched your career closely, and thus far have not been dissatisfied.

"It is now my wish that you come and see Southwold. Do not misunderstand me, nor imagine that I intend more than I say. I simply desire that you make your arrangements to pass at least a portion of the summer here.

"Please give me your answer as soon as possible. With regards to your mother, I remain

"Your affectionate uncle,

"Floyd Southwold."

"How characteristic!" exclaimed Mrs. Southwold.

"What shall I do about it?" asked Floyd.

"Accept of course."

This was said so easily that her son little suspected the conflict that had passed in her bosom during the perusal of that brief note. To separate from her son even for a few weeks was always a trial; how great a one then was this proposed absence, which would certainly be for months, and might be for a much longer period. Yet as she had often reproached herself for haste in declining his Uncle's first offer, she determined to urge her son's acceptance of this, harshly as it was made.

"But how can I leave you, mother?" said Floyd tenderly.

"Oh, I shall do very well, I have no doubt. Nannie will be able to stay with me, so you must give yourself no uneasiness on my account, but remain as long as you like."

So Mrs. Southwold did all in her power to expedite the departure of her son, never permitting herself to dwell on the long lonely hours that she must pass when the light of her house was gone, but keeping up her wonted cheerfulness, and bidding him a smiling good-by.

CHAPTER V.

"It was in the time that the earth begins to put on her new apparel against the approach of her lover, and that the sun, running a more even course, becomes an indifferent arbiter between the day and the night."

Arcadia.—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

"Farewell, tho' death be in the word—
For ever!"

Cato.—ADDISON.

"Our souls are in a miserable captivity if the light of grace and heavenly truth doth not shine continually upon us."

BURTON'S ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY.

IT was a beautiful spring morning, so early that there was a crimson glow in the sunlight, and the grass was drenched with the last night's dew. Floyd stood on the platform of the little station-house awaiting the train, enjoying keenly the gorgeous tinting of the eastern sky and the fresh purity of the bracing air. He was accompanied by Nannie, and surrounded by a group of friends, gentlemen whose business called them to the city, and a few heroic ladies who had risen to see them off. He had a smile and a kind word for every one, for he was full of pleasurable excitement at the proposed change, and with the hopefulness of youth looked forward with bright anticipations to his new life,

dreaming of future happiness and enjoyments, as only they can dream who have never known the sickening disappointments, the cares, and the sorrows that await even the most successful.

Very soon there was a distant whistle, then a wreath of white smoke curled up above a group of trees, and in another moment the train thundered up the track. A hasty good-by, a kiss to Nannie, and with its freight of busy passengers it dashed away down the long vista of woods, over the salt marsh, and by the shore, now through a scattered village, then by a busy town, upon perilous bridges and embankments, and at last through a dark tunnel into the great metropolis.

Immediately upon their arrival every one appeared seized with the contagious bustle and confusion, and rushed desperately off as if some fearful calamity depended upon the delay of a moment. Escaping as soon as possible from the hurrying crowd, Floyd strolled idly away towards the great thoroughfare of Broadway—choosing his way, with the vain hope of finding shade, under the stumpy trees of Union Square, marvelling much in passing at the melancholy fountain that never plays.

Arrived opposite Grace Church his vagrant attention was attracted by a line of private carriages drawn up before it. The veiled lady in her snowy dress, the bevy of fair bridesmaids, and the profusion of white favors, at once informed him that it was a wedding; and with the curiosity of idleness, he turned into the church.

He had some difficulty in making his way through the crowd at the door, and during the momentary delay he said to a gentlemanly person who was near him:

"Can you tell me, sir, the names of the bridal couple?"

"With pleasure; the lady is Miss Wentworth, the only child of one of our wealthiest citizens; the gentleman is a Mr. Lascelles."

Floyd thanked his polite informant, wondering a little as he walked on, at the covert sneer of his last words. At the time he attributed it less to the insignificance of the man himself than to that universal feeling among the sex, whether it be abstract envy or jealousy, that leads them to disparage the fortunate winner of any lady who has sufficient attractions either of beauty or riches to render her alliance peculiarly desirable.

The first thing that attracted Floyd's attention after he had taken his seat, was the building itself. The dashing queen of city churches, with its light walls and gaudy windows, struck him as being far more appropriate as a fane of fashion than a temple for the solemn worship of the great Jehovah. The sound of low laughter and only half-whispered conversation, which mingled with the peal of the noble organ, jarred disagreeably on his nerves.

He next turned with kindly curiosity to examine those who were about to be joined in bonds indissoluble except by death or crime. The fair young bride seemed fully impressed with the solemnity of the moment; her eyes were full of unshed tears, and her whole figure trembled with emotion. Her companion, on the contrary, had anything but the joyous look a man should wear when he wins the woman who holds his heart. There was only ill-concealed annoyance in his knit brow, and cold calculation in his sinister

glances. He was deadly pale, with a spot of hectic red on either cheek, and it seemed an effort for him to give even decent attention to the service; and well it might be so, for there close beside him stood Medora Fielding.

She was not among the bridesmaids, but formed one of the group of young friends who had been asked to attend in the *demi-toilette* suited to the morning reception that was to follow. She was looking magnificently in a blue silk of so exquisite a shade that you would have thought it had been matched to the clear azure of her eyes. No one could have guessed that the calm indifference of her manner concealed a volcano of rage and scorn. Fortunate was it for that confiding bride that she possessed not the power of the fabled Medusa, even though her glances should yet prove more fatal to her happiness than if they had that moment stopped the warm life-blood at her heart, and turned her into stone.

Medora was one of the first to kiss and congratulate "Mrs. Lascelles;" then she turned to the bridegroom:

"Allow me to wish you every happiness."

The words were so calmly spoken that he regarded her with sudden surprise. Was this the woman who three short months before had hung upon his every word with passionate fondness? His eyes for a moment rested longingly on her graceful form as she turned away; even then the old charm was not altogether broken. Will it ever be? Do you think the lover of Rhodadaphne could have been entirely faithful to his "mountain maid" unless the beautiful enchantress had been lost to him for ever?

As Floyd Southwold waited in the vestibule for the bridal party to pass, a lady in the group dropped her

fan. Although there were several gentlemen with her, no one appeared to notice it until he sprang forward to pick it up; then many eager hands were stretched forth, but too late. Floyd, with a courteous smile, presented it to Medora; he had intended to utter some commonplace words, but the syllables died on his lips as his glance fell on that superb beauty.

Never in his wildest dreams had he conceived anything so lovely; and had her polite "thank you, sir," been some weird incantation he could not have been more completely spell-bound. He bowed with mechanical civility, but could not take his gaze from that face whose perfect outlines had been fatal to the peace of so many. He followed her as if it had been a visible chain that enslaved him, and watched with eager eyes while she waited for her carriage, and was handed in by some fortunate youth whom he regarded with intense envy because for one moment that tiny gloved hand rested in his.

The crowd dispersed, there was no reason why he should linger, and he walked slowly away, bewildered as one recovering from a trance. All day long he was haunted by that fair vision; it made him strangely awkward in the execution of the trifling business to which he was obliged to attend; and during the night ride on the noisy and dusty railroad which desecrates the shores of the beautiful Hudson, his few snatches of sleep were haunted with the golden hair and the azure eyes of the lovely unknown.

And where, meanwhile, was the heroine of his dreams? Back again in that little parlor, now all the more dingy in the growing brightness of spring, she was leaning out

of an open window, and gazing at the dull red glow which was all of the sunset ever seen there, she was thinking how glorious must be the radiance of the declining day on that ocean, over which the great steamer was already bearing the bridegroom and the bride to spend the first honeymoons of marriage in rambling over Europe.

She was quite alone, and after a few moments her head sank on her folded arms. Hot bitter tears forced themselves through her closed lids, and her whole frame shook with passionate sobs. The pent-up anguish of that long, wretched day, at last found vent; her crushed heart moaned in a low wail over the broken dream, the faithless lover. And while she was struggling alone with her sorrow, he was unmindful of her, absorbed in his fair young wife, and enjoying every luxury that wealth could give. For her there was no hope of escape from the poverty she so loathed, except by giving her hand without her heart; a dreary prospect, to one so ardent as herself. Pride had supported her while she was surrounded by curious eyes, but now, alone, with no one to see her weep but darkness and silence, the full tide of her grief and despair overflowed in scalding tears that, far from refreshing her parched soul, feel like the dews of the deadly Upas, each one a drop of poison.

Yet, that night was the last that Medora Fielding gave to lamentations. The agony she had endured during Lascelles' brief engagement had been fearful; all the more so because she had spent most of her time in a round of fashionable gaiety, where she was obliged to make a constant effort to appear in her usual spirits. To a strong passionate nature like hers, the crushing out of

the love that had been its life, was a fearful blow; her whole soul staggered under the shock, and in some of the long hours that she spent in tossing on a restless couch it seemed as if reason itself tottered on its throne.

And she groped all her weary way through this valley of the shadow of Death, without one ray of light from above. Religion had never been more to her than a name; and in this hour of trial, instead of bowing to whatever might be the sorrows of her lot, she rebelled madly at what she deemed an unjust punishment. There was no one with whom she would converse regarding her feelings. She was too haughtily proud to seek consolation from strangers, and she had discovered long ago that her mother could not give one reason for the faith she professed, and would utterly fail of any kind sympathy in her disappointment or loving counsel for the future. As for consulting with her upon the subject of her harassing doubts, she knew well she should receive the old answer which had met all previous inquiries and already done infinite harm.

"My dear, you should not ask such questions; it is very wrong to argue upon religion."

Of course an intelligent girl like Medora was sure to think—

"It must be a poor creed that will not stand the test of discussion."

With a mind already inclined to scepticism, this was almost enough to prove the falsity of the system so weakly defended. Had it been otherwise—had she fallen under wiser and gentler influences—this trial, perhaps more severe to one of her temperament than anything conceivable, might have had upon her a most chasten-

ing and ennobling effect, turning all her great talents and immense energies to the working of much good both to herself and others.

In almost every life there is some great turning-point, some ordeal either of joy or grief, which tests the character to the utmost. The manner in which that crisis is met, shapes either for good or evil the whole future career. At such a moment, when this world seems all too short for enjoyment or too long for suffering, every reflecting person is forced to contemplate that shadowy hereafter, which one day we all must enter—then either to the trembling rejoicer or the weeping mourner there is a wealth of consolation in that unquestioning faith, which rests confidently on that Superior Power that orders "all things well." But if at that awful time, the mind, either from the force of circumstances or from some inherent defect, refuses to the Creator the homage of either thanksgiving or prayer, and with defiant incredulity, riots in ungrateful enjoyment or mourns in rayless despair, dreadful, indeed, is it to contemplate what must be the utter hopelessness of that lost soul!

When that last night of grief was past, Medora rose up, and relying solely on herself, with no more faith in the restraints of either virtue or religion, except so far as they agreed with policy, resolutely put aside all thoughts of the past, and determined to bring every energy to bear upon obtaining success, by any means however unscrupulous.

There is something truly fearful in the power for evil, which that woman possesses, perfectly beautiful, supremely fascinating, and utterly unprincipled!

CHAPTER VI.

"It was a venerable mansion, half villa, half farm-house."
Mountjoy.—IRVING.

"For just experience tells in every soil,
That those that think must govern those that toil."
The Traveller.—GOLDSMITH.

It had been dark some hours when Floyd reached the nearest station to Southwold. He found his uncle's carriage awaiting him, and was soon rolling over a fine road towards that old homestead of the family, which he had so long wished to behold, and of which he had so often dreamed. There was no moon, so that he could only see the dim outline of the rustic lodge at the gate: and once inside, the shadow of the avenue of trees was so deep, that it was impossible to discover anything beyond the drooping branches, as one after another they were illumined by the fitful gleam of the coach lanterns in passing. After a drive of some three quarters of a mile they came into an open space, Floyd distinguished the lights from a large house, and in another instant the carriage stopped at the steps of a broad piazza.

The sound of approaching wheels aroused Floyd Southwold, Senior, and he came out into the wide low hall to meet his nephew. He was a man of some sixty years, but hale and erect, with abundant iron grey hair.

His broad white forehead and heavy brow shaded a pair of piercing black eyes, which attracted you irresistibly from their look of clear, deep thought, even while you were unconsciously repelled by the hard cold lines about the mouth, that impressed you with the idea of much sternness, and perhaps egotism of character. He had always been a strikingly handsome man, and could, at pleasure, be very fascinating; yet it had been once said of him by a shrewd woman of the world, that the reason why Mr. Southwold had never married was, because he was so conscious of his own beauty, and so occupied with the admiration it deserved to receive, that he had no time to pay that absorbed devotion to the charms of the fair sex, without which their favor is rarely won.

Such was the tall and stately man who now advanced with outstretched hand to meet Floyd, welcoming him with great cordiality, and conducting him at once to the supper spread in the dining-room. This was a fine large apartment, heavily wainscoted in oak, and furnished with crimson velvet, mounted to correspond. A wood fire burned on the hearth; though the windows were open it was very comfortable, as the night was cool, and the red glow of the flames gave added cheefulness to the room, already well lighted by a suspended bronze lamp. The sideboard and table displayed much elegant old-fashioned plate and antique cut glass; altogether there was an air of luxury and neatness that Floyd had scarcely expected to see in a bachelor establishment.

With the keen appetite of a traveller he did ample justice to the well-supplied board, his wants being attended to by Christian, a grey-haired mulatto waiter, who had been for years in the service of the family. His

natural solemnity of look was increased by an imposing pair of silver-mounted spectacles, and he went through his duties with a stately pomposity wonderful to behold.

The meal over, Mr. Southwold pushed open a door, which had stood ajar, and ushered Floyd into the library. This was a delightful room, entirely lined with black-walnut book-cases, except on one side, where a handsome wood fire was burning, and at the end, where a huge bay-window lighted it abundantly, and formed the nicest place in the world for reading. The shelves contained a splendid collection of books, the greater portion of which had been obtained by the present owner's grandfather, while on a visit to England, though all the best modern works had since been added. There were any quantity of delightfully comfortable chairs, of all varieties of shape, and several study tables, on one of which stood a shaded lamp.

"This is rather my favorite room," said Mr. Southwold, seating himself, "that is, when I have no lady company; they generally prefer the parlor and boudoir."

"I am not surprised at your choice," rejoined Floyd, his eyes sparkling with anticipated delight as they fell on the rich stores around him.

Mr. Southwold.—"To a solitary bachelor, like myself, there is no companionship so reliable as that of books. I am less alone when surrounded by these familiar faces."

Floyd.—"I am sure it would be difficult to feel either unhappy or solitary here."

Mr. S.—"You think so? Perhaps even this spell, potent as it is, might not always be sufficient to charm away some harassing thought."

F. with a sudden vision of the blue-eyed angel of the morning.—"Perhaps not. I can imagine that a day-dream might sometimes mar even the flowing verse of Terence or Ovid, and steal across the most sublime passages of Lysias or Demosthenes."

Mr. S.—"I see you have not lost your college taste for the classics."

F.—"By no means; it seems to me that I shall always love better the resounding lines of Horace and Virgil than the fairest verses of Dante and Tasso. I prefer infinitely the Medea of Euripides to the Andromaque of Racine."

Mr. S.—"You are eloquent, sir; but I do not wonder at your warmth, for I myself, to this day, have the same admiration for the *ore rotundo* of the ancients. I have a very good collection of them, I think; most of them Elzevirs and Wolfgangs. You may find some works among them that you have not hitherto seen."

F.—"I should like to examine them vastly, though, after all, the text-books of the schoolboy are the purest and most elegant classics."

Mr. S.—"I am glad to hear you say that, for, like the courtly premier of George II., I have no patience with that pedantry which affects an admiration for the obscure writers of antiquity."

F. rising and approaching the book-shelves.—"I have so often longed to have unlimited leisure and access to such a library, and never before enjoyed the opportunity."

Mr. S.—"Not now, Floyd, it is too late. I know you must be fatigued, you will have ample time hereafter."

F. glancing at the clock.—"I see it is near midnight; I had no idea of the hour."

Mr. S.—"Yes, you had better ring for your candle." To the servant, entering: "Christian, show Mr. Southwold to his room." To Floyd: "We breakfast at nine, and now good-night."

The following morning, long before that hour, Floyd was down stairs, and availed himself of the spare moments to see something of Southwold. It had been originally a low, square house, built of Dutch brick, with a deep sloping roof, making dormer windows in all the second story rooms. In the older part, on the ground floor, there was a wide hall running through from front to rear. This was panelled in old oak, ornamented with several deer's horns, and a set of choice hunting scenes. On either hand had formerly been two large apartments. Those we saw last night, dining-room and library, remained unchanged; on the other side only one, that at the back retained its first design, this was a parlor, handsomely furnished in blue, and containing several choice pictures. The front room formed a wide hall, thrown into one with the main entry by means of an arch, and panelled to correspond. It was the communication with the wing which the father of the present owner had built, and which was rather larger than the original house, being two stories and a half high, and broader by the width of the piazza running across the front of the older part. It contained four fine chambers on the second floor, and down stairs the private suite of Mr. Southwold, and an immense drawing-room, some forty feet long, full of elegant furniture, superb mirrors, and beautiful paintings. There was also a small bou-

doir, glowing in delicate rose-colored walls, sofas, and curtains. The wide hall, already described, formed a fine gallery, in which were hung the family portraits for the last five generations, ending with a very excellent one of the present proprietor, taken early in life.

Of course, Floyd did not see all this at that time; but after a casual glance at the great drawing-room and the pictures of his ancestors, he went to the front door. It opened on a piazza quite overgrown with roses and honeysuckles, now in full bloom, fairly loading the air with fragrance. The view from that point was not very extended, only the wide lawn, dotted with patches of flowers and fringed with fine trees, principally oak; the drive sweeping around it; and on one side a glimpse of the gardens, and the glitter of the sunlight on the glass of the green-houses and grapery.

Remembering that the Hudson lay at the back of the house, Floyd descended the steps and walked slowly in that direction. As he advanced new beauties burst upon him; at first the "Storm King" rising majestically on the opposite shore, and farther on, looking down the vistas which had been cut through the trees, there was the river itself sparkling and dancing in the bright morning sun, here and there dotted with a white sail. Beyond that, again, the soft slope of the other bank, with its many beautiful houses rising above the delicate green of the surrounding foliage.

He walked a short distance down a path which led towards the water, but recollecting himself and glancing at his watch, he saw that it was but a few minutes before nine and retraced his steps. On turning, he had a very good view of the house. There was another wide piazza

arross the whole length to the bay-window; and from the irregularity of the building, the grey color of the old brick, and the vines which overran it in glorious luxuriance, there was something pleasingly picturesque in its appearance.

Floyd met his uncle in the hall, and they proceeded to breakfast together.

"Have you been down to the river?" asked Mr. Southwold.

"No, I started, but found I had not time."

"Then you did not see how that abominable railroad has cut up my shore; but I have endeavored to counteract the defect as far as possible, by setting out bushes and vines along the sides. I am not so badly off as my neighbors, however, as I have but one deep cut, although that is very deep. I have almost concealed it by a skilfully placed screen."

"But do you not find the cars a great convenience?"

"I presume they are to those gentlemen who are obliged to go to town every day, but as I rarely travel in them, even now, they are only a misfortune to me."

The breakfast over, Floyd went at once to the library, and was deep in the examination of some quaint old authors when his uncle summoned him for a ride. Going out on the piazza as soon as he was equipped, he found the two saddle horses in readiness. Mr. Southwold had just mounted, and sat stately and erect with easy enjoyment, curbing the impatience of the fiery animal he bestrode. A delicately shaped sorrel mare was awaiting Floyd, who hastened to spring into the saddle and join his uncle.

"Are you a good horseman?" he inquired as they trotted down the avenue.

"I am not much accustomed to riding," replied Floyd; "you know I have no great opportunity for it at home, but I can appreciate a fine animal when I see it."

"You will soon become acquainted with these; they are both very amiable, though 'Presto' has such a fiery eye."

"Presto? that is your mount, I presume."

"Yes, I call him so because he is indeed *swift*. To tell the truth I am rather proud of him. You notice his white feet and nose? He is one of old 'Boston's sons,' and though only half-bred possesses most of the characteristics of the sire. He will sulk sometimes, but I have ridden him so long that we understand each other pretty well."

"He is a beautiful creature, but I admire this little mare very much."

"Yes, she is fashionably thorough-bred. I call her Danaë, because she looks as if a shower of gold might have descended upon her, and left its hue on her shining coat."

Both gentlemen enjoyed the ride keenly; it was a beautiful morning, almost the very last day of May, but still cool enough to render exercise agreeable. The air was clear and pure as a draught from an Elysian fountain, and the sunlight poured its flood of liquid gold over fields and woods and the tranquil river.

Oh! magnificent sunshine of America! how far superior to the vaunted glories of Italy and the Havana! On one of our bright October days, when the trees are dyed with the myriad hues of all the rubies and jaspers

of the Orient, or on a morning like this when nature is smiling in the delicate robe of early summer, how exquisite the radiance of the dancing sunbeams. But it is, perhaps, in this attribute of lustrous purity that our sunlight excels that of all other countries. For there is a crimson glow that lingers through the brightest of Italian days, and the ocean that watches around the Queen of the Antilles obscures her clearest mornings with the misty breath of his everlasting homage, whose chorus dies in the resounding chimes of the waves at her feet. But here the gorgeous sun pours down the intensest lustre of his dazzling beams, as if this alone were the land of his beloved Leucothöe.

As they galloped on, Floyd was surprised to find that his uncle knew nearly every one they met; and more than once he reined up beside a carriage-load of young people, exchanging a smile and a joke with all, so that before they had ridden many miles his nephew had quite an extensive acquaintance. Coming out on a point commanding a fine view, Mr. Southwold said:

"That very beautiful house, literally a cottage *ornée*, is Mr. Le Roy Clarkson's place—'Lazy-Bank,' as his gay wife calls it. The family have not left the city yet, but they will be here shortly. This, on our right, is 'Ash Grove,' Mr. Ashley's seat. We will go in and lunch there. I can always reckon on a cordial reception. I dare say you will not object."

"I confess," replied Floyd, "the ride has given me a splendid appetite."

Mr. Southwold had made no false calculation. Both uncle and nephew were warmly welcomed by Mr. Ashley and his two charming daughters. So much did they

enjoy their visit that they lingered so long that when they reached home it was very near Mr. Southwold's invariable dinner hour of four o'clock.

When Floyd entered the parlor, after changing his dress, he found his uncle conversing with two gentlemen who had stopped half way on a long drive to some inland farms, relying upon the well known hospitality of Southwold for their dinner. The meal passed off very pleasantly, as Messrs. Grey and Verplanck were both agreeable men, although it was rendered somewhat funny by Mr. Southwold's ineffectual endeavors to hurry its progress, in order that his guests might reach their homes before dark. All his efforts were made abortive by the fixed ideas of propriety held by Christian. In vain did his master say to him when he was laboriously performing some of the table solemnities not absolutely necessary to comfort :

"Never mind that, Christian, try to make haste."

Christian regarded him with a look of mild reproof, and went on with the regular routine of his duties unmoved by this and all similar appeals, until they were relinquished in despair. When the wine was at last placed on the table and the servants withdrawn, Mr. Southwold said apologetically :

"Christian is a most excellent butler, but he does not like to have his arrangements interfered with, although they are sometimes rather peculiar. I recollect on one occasion several gentlemen arrived quite unexpectedly to dine. When seated at table, the meal presented an imposing appearance, but I observed that he failed to remove the cover from one of the four centre dishes. In vain I endeavored, by nods and looks, to inform him of

his omission, and at last I was obliged to take advantage of a general laugh to whisper as he passed:

"'Why do you not uncover that dish, Christian?'

"With admirable presence of mind he seized a champagne bottle, and said as he bent down to fill my glass:

"'Uniformity, sir, uniformity.'

"Of course I said no more, but sat in dread lest some one else might incautiously make manifest its emptiness."

During the laugh which followed this story, the gentlemen rose to go. As soon as uncle and nephew were alone, Mr. Southwold said:

"I was somewhat surprised to see Grey, he has not been here much of late."

"He seems a very pleasant man," replied Floyd.

"In some respects he is, but the most pertinacious individual I ever met; he wanted me to sell him a piece of land for his widowed sister, as he could get no other near him, and bored me terribly about it, but I would not be the first to alienate my ancestral acres. I hope my successors will have the same feeling;" then after a moment's pause he continued, "there are two things which I wish we had in this country—the right of entail and Game Laws."

"They are rather anti-republican," replied Floyd.

"So they are; but I feel an irrepressible sadness when I think that fifty years hence there may not be one acre of this fine property in our family, and it fairly makes my blood boil to see these wretched boors shooting even all the rabbits and squirrels off my land. Why, I can remember when there was very fair sport about here, and now we are obliged to go into the mountains

to get a shot at anything; even then it does not amount to much."

"But," suggested Floyd, "do you not think that this scarcity of game depends less upon the absence of laws to protect it than upon the extreme severity of our winters? I fancy there never was what could be called first-rate sport about here."

"Perhaps not, but your argument, although undoubtedly to a certain degree correct with regard to this portion of our country, does not apply to regions further to the southward, and is only an added reason for guarding what game we have. I live in daily expectation of some change in our mismanaged government, and hope that it will effect this, with various other desirable results; to tell the truth, I do not believe this Republic will last out even my time."

"Why not?" exclaimed Floyd, astonished; "pray, let me hear the premises from which you deduce this conclusion."

"Simply, they are these—when our population becomes dense, the poorer classes must necessarily outnumber the people of the middle and higher ranks; then the overwhelming vote, which under our present constitution and laws they will have, will give them the complete control of government, and they will, of course, legislate for their own advantage. This will render it absolutely necessary for the property of the country, for its own preservation, to usurp power, even at the risk of a revolution."

"Undoubtedly there is some justice in what you say. When such a state of affairs does occur, it must be productive of disasters; but," urged Floyd, "when you

contemplate this vast expanse of territory, and its infinite resources for supporting population, it postpones to an indefinitely remote period such a catastrophe."

"Not at all, not at all; our country must be occupied in detail, and always from great centres; we already see the causes I have mentioned in operation, in all our large towns, especially in our great metropolis, the worst governed and worst taxed city in the world."

"True," said Floyd; "I presume there is no doubt that the whole of its vast expenditure goes to support in office a set of incompetent persons."

"*Incompetent persons!*" cried Mr. Southwold, excitedly; "incompetent persons, rascally vagabonds you mean. No, no, my dear fellow, this idea of Democracy and Republicanism is Utopian. The only possible hope of success under such institutions is in the immaculate virtue of the governed, who are also the governors; whereas, the very necessity for laws proves the fallacy of that dependence."

"But, the rights of man—"

"Absurd!" interrupted Mr. Southwold, rising; then with a smile he added, "Excuse me, I am too warm, let us close this useless discussion. I lose all patience when I think of this subject; after all, I fear I shall not live to see the end."

With a sigh he turned to other themes of less exciting interest.

This day was a fair sample of those that followed, driving, riding and walking occupying the mornings, the evenings closing with a dinner party either at home or at some friend's house. Mr. Southwold was noted for his hospitality, so that he was rarely alone, guests either

invited or unexpected constantly arriving to take a single meal or to remain a few days.

Floyd and his uncle were congenial in their tastes in many respects; and although Mr. Southwold's natural egotism had been fostered by a long life of bachelor self-indulgence until it had assumed proportions almost colossal, yet as his nephew was a most unselfish and amiable person, it was rarely that this want of thought touched him. Thus the days flew by, and Floyd keenly enjoyed this idle existence of ease and amusement.

CHAPTER VII.

"DIOGÈNE.—'Est-ce que vous avez envie de donner le bal?'

PLUTON.—'Pourquoi le bal?'

DIOGÈNE.—'Ces qu'ils sont en fort bon équipage pour danser. Ils sont jolis, ma foi, je n'ai jamais rien vu de si dameret ni de si galant.'"

Les Héros de Roman.—BOILEAU.

"——— æmula lumina stellis
Lumina quæ possent solicitatæ Dios."

ONE morning when Floyd had been at Southwold about a fortnight, he was seated reading on the front piazza, where he was completely concealed by the thick vines, when he heard the sound of horses' hoofs coming up the drive. This did not, however, attract his attention from his book, until he heard the clear ringing tones of a lady's voice:

"Is Mr. Southwold at home?"

He started up, and looking through the leaves saw a very handsome woman, mounted on a fine horse, and attended only by a groom. Her black habit fitted perfectly, and displayed, to great advantage, her full bust and taper waist. The exercise had brought a bright color in the clear olive of her cheeks, and her eyes sparkled with health and animation. Of course a summons from so fair a visitor could not be disregarded,

and Floyd hastened down the steps just as a servant, to whom the inquiry had been addressed, answered:

"Yes, ma'am, he is on the piazza."

Floyd advanced with a low bow.

"Excuse me, sir," said the lady, looking at him, "but I asked for Mr. Southwold."

"I am Mr. Southwold, Madam," with another bow.

"I mean Mr. Floyd Southwold."

"But that is my name, madam."

The pretty brunette here burst into a merry laugh, and said: "Then you have dropped at least thirty years since I last saw you, but with your age you seem also to have lost your gallantry, or you would have asked me to dismount."

"I beg your pardon," replied Floyd, "allow me to assist you."

"No, no!" said the lady, catching a glimpse of Mr. Southwold, who that moment appeared in the doorway, "there is your older and more polite namesake, he shall have the honor."

"Why! Mrs. Clarkson," exclaimed Mr. Southwold, as soon as he saw the fair horsewoman, "how do you do, and when did you come?"

"I am very well," replied the lady, "and if you mean when did I come on to the river, we arrived last night, and have no one with us, so that, as Le Roy was too lazy to ride, I was obliged to set forth alone, but if you mean when did I come here, about five minutes ago, during which time this ungallant young man, who says his name is Floyd Southwold, has never asked me to enter the house."

"He told the truth, madam, though I am sorry he

disgraced the name by such a want of courtesy. It is my nephew, Floyd Southwold, junior,—Mrs. Le Roy Clarkson."

Floyd bowed as he said, "I awaited my uncle's permission, madam, to ask you to alight, as without that I should never have dared to invite so fair an enchantress to enter a hitherto impregnable castle of bachelors. Have we not all heard of the magic of black eyes!"

"I forgive you," said Mrs. Clarkson, laughingly extending her hand, "and you may help me down."

She sprang lightly to the ground. The groom led away the horses, and the lady walked into the hall with her two attendants.

"Where will you sit, madam?" asked Mr. Southwold, "you know the whole house is at your service. Shall we go into the boudoir?"

"The boudoir in a riding-dress and with *two* men!—Terrible idea! when that should be sacred to white muslin, and *tête-à-tête*. No! I prefer the library this morning."

Before they had been long seated, or Mrs. Clarkson had half done unfolding her budget of city gossip, lunch was prepared and they were summoned to the dining-room. When the solids were dispatched, and they gave their attention to the fruit, Mr. Southwold turned to Mrs. Clarkson, and said—

"Shall it be *Maraschino* to-day with your strawberries?"

"No, I think I will take *Parfait Amour*,—I always prefer that when there are any handsome men present."

Both gentlemen bowed and drank her health enthusiastically.

"Now," said Mr. Southwold, "let us have some more town news."

"I believe I have told you all except—let me see! Oh! there was Lucy Wentworth's wedding."

Floyd becoming suddenly interested, "Miss Wentworth, did you say? How long ago was that?"

Mrs. Clarkson.—"About a month, I should think. Their honeymoon must be just about over. Why? Did you know her?"

Floyd.—"No, but I saw her married. I happened to be passing the church just as the bride arrived, and so went in."

Mrs. C.—"You don't say so! Did you think her pretty?"

F.—"No! But very sweet and lovely."

Mr. Southwold.—"Her father is very wealthy, is he not?"

Mrs. C.—"Yes, half a million they say, and she is his only child. That was the attraction, I fear—such a queer hurried up affair. Why, they were only engaged two months. They do say, though, that Lascelles was so in debt they had to be married."

Mr. S.—"What did you say the young man's name was?"

Mrs. C.—"Lascelles."

Mr. S. musingly,—"Lascelles! I never heard it before. He cannot be a person of any condition."

Mrs. C.—"Dear me, no! Some nobody from New England, but she was terribly in love with him, and her father was so fond of her that he could refuse her nothing; so he let her marry this young man, who positively had nothing in his favor except a pretty complexion."

Mr. S.—"A most excellent recommendation for a husband truly!"

Mrs. C.—"He had no other, I assure you. The whole affair was wretchedly managed. They sailed for Europe the very afternoon of the wedding-day—that, I think a grand mistake! The idea of *mal du mer* in the honey-moon!"

Mr. S.—"Shocking indeed! Anything more?"

Mrs. C.—"Nothing, but that they were married in May."

Mr. S.—"And pray what of that?"

Mrs. C.—"Why you know they say of a couple married in May, one always dies young."

F.—who had been eagerly watching for a pause to make an inquiry, now asked, "Were you present at the ceremony?"

Mrs. C.—"Yes!"

F.—"Then perhaps you can tell me the name of a young lady whom I saw there; she was very handsome, with light hair and the most beautiful blue eyes in the world."

Mrs. C.—"Of course I can, there is only one woman in New York whom you can mean, and that is Medora Fielding. So she victimized you even in those few moments."

F. blushing crimson,—"I certainly admired her appearance very much."

Mr. S.—"By the way, Mrs. Clarkson, I have never seen that friend of yours, Miss Fielding!"

Mrs. C.—"Well! you will soon, for she is coming here in about a month to make a nice long visit."

Mr. S.—"Is she? Well, if she is really as handsome as you say, I shall give her a party."

Mrs. C.—"Oh! how splendid! Mr. Southwold, you are always charming." Then rising, "Mr. Floyd, will you ring for my horse."

Mr. S.—"Don't be so cruel as to leave us."

Mrs. C.—"I really must go. It is shockingly late, and Le Roy will be anxious."

Mr. S.—"Well, if you insist; but you will not be rid of us so easily after all, for we will accompany you—that is, with your permission."

Mrs. C.—"With all my heart."

They had a delightful ride; but though Mrs. Clarkson was as pleasant as ever, Floyd heard very little of what she said. This mention of that beautiful woman had revived the recollection of her loveliness in all its first freshness, and he longed for the time to arrive when he should see her again.

Yet the month rolled swiftly away, and August came, with its ardent sun and gorgeous flowers.

No one hailed its advent with more delight than Medora Fielding. She and her mother had been spending the summer at Seachester, a petty watering-place, where there was no one upon whom to exercise her fascinations, except some very young men, not one of whom was eligible as a *parti*. These poor victims had, to be sure, been reduced to a state bordering upon distraction, and generally rendered wretched, and set by the ears, merely that their society might while away tedious hours, and their humble homage afford relief from harassing thought, and for the gratification of that spirit of coquetry which was fast becoming a necessity of her existence. Still she felt that the moments had been wasted so far as the present object—the securing a wealthy and

brilliant alliance—was concerned. When, therefore, the time arrived for her to visit Lazy-Bank, she was rejoiced to leave the scene of her recent worthless triumphs.

The two friends met rapturously; Mr. Clarkson joining in the boisterous greetings of his delighted wife. Kind as he was, however, the ladies longed for a *tête-à-tête*, and made a pretence of retiring early, in order that they might, unconstrained, have a feminine interchange of gossip. Fancy them, then, in slippers and *robes de chambre*, cozily seated in Medora's dressing room.

"My dear girl," exclaimed Mrs. Clarkson, for the twentieth time, "I am so glad you have come."

"You have no idea how happy I am to be here," answered Medora; "I so longed to see you, and then I was terribly bored at Seachester."

"Why, didn't you have a nice time there? I heard you were a great belle."

"*Comme ça?* but in the words of the unfortunate Robinson Crusoe—

> "'Better dwell in the midst of alarms
> Than reign in that horrible place.'"

"Well," said Mrs. Clarkson, laughingly, "I hope you will enjoy yourself here. You have made one conquest already."

"How so? Why, I have seen no one but Mr. Clarkson since I came, and I discovered long ago that his heart is impregnable."

"Yes! Le Roy is hopeless, I believe. But this victim you have never seen, though he saw you some two months ago, and has raved about you ever since."

"How romantic! Pray who is it?"

"It is Floyd Southwold."

"Nonsense, *ma chère!* Why, he is as venerable as time."

"Oh! I don't mean the old gentleman, but his nephew, namesake, and adopted heir."

Medora was roused into sudden interest by the last words. "That is quite another matter. Is he handsome?"

"Yes, very! the loveliest grey eyes imaginable; and I presume when his uncle dies he will have an estate worth nearly a million."

"You don't say so! Why, I quite long to see him."

"'Tis true, *mon amie.* You shall see him to-morrow. I will write a note in the morning, and ask him and his uncle to dine here."

The consequence of this conversation was, the following evening found Mr. Southwold and Floyd driving towards Mr. LeRoy Clarkson's place. It had been one of those sultry midsummer days, when all nature lies tranquil, with hushed breath, beneath the fiery glances of the sun; but that ardent monarch was sinking, exhausted, into the purple and crimson glories of the west, as they came up the avenue at Lazy-Bank.

All around the house was a perfect wilderness of flowers, growing up in vines to the very eaves, and spreading out in bushes under the windows. It was built somewhat in the Italian villa style, with fanciful verandas and queer oriel windows. The place comprised only some sixteen acres, but the whole of this was kept in the most perfect order. The taste of the

mistress was most manifest in the profusion of flowers. They were everywhere, overrunning the stables as well as the house and arbors, and gleaming in gay *parterres* on the lawn. Even at the foots of the trees, little beds of anemones and violets sprang up out of the grass, and splendid day lilies made the shadiest places bright.

On entering the house, the gentlemen were shown into the drawing-room, where the same fanciful taste was visible in the exquisite French paper painted in wreaths of roses, and the dainty mirrors and furniture. After a moment they were joined by Mr. Clarkson, who informed them that the ladies were enjoying the sunset in the west veranda. Following their host, they were conducted through a window on to the piazza, where there was a splendid view of the Hudson and the hills.

Mrs. Clarkson greeted them with her usual vivacity, and presented her friend, Miss Fielding. If Floyd had been fascinated before, the spell was riveted now. As she stood there in a dress of white muslin ornamented with rose-colored ribbons, the mellow light of the setting sun fairly illuminating her golden hair and thin drapery, he was almost ready to adore her as an angel. He should have remembered that he who was fair enough to be called "Son of the Morning" was once an angel too.

As no one else was expected, dinner was soon announced. Floyd had the happiness of handing Medora in, and sitting beside her during the meal. She was more brilliant than usual, and so charmed was Mr. Southwold, that when the ladies withdrew, leaving the gentlemen to their wine and cigars, he said to Floyd:

"Really, I do not blame you for your admiration of Miss Fielding. She is magnificent."

Floyd, who was almost bewildered with the thousand new sensations that were trembling in his breast, scarcely knew what to reply, and very soon rose to quit the table.

"Are you going to leave us?" asked Mr. Clarkson.

"Yes," replied Floyd, "capital as your wine is, I prefer the sparkle of the ladies' chat."

"You are quite right," said Mr. Southwold, "but don't be too devoted to γλαυκῶπις."

Floyd found them still on the veranda, as the moonlight was superb, and they preferred the cool night air to the closer atmosphere of the house. He seated himself near Medora, and when the other gentlemen joined Mrs. Clarkson, their merry talk left them quite alone. The moments glided away without his knowing how, in listening to the silvery tones of Medora's voice. Her ideas on most subjects were new and original, and there was a self-reliance and evidence of thought in her conversation that he had never before met in a lady. She, too, was well pleased with her companion. Of course she had intended to fascinate him before she saw him; for, was he not rich? But she was surprised to find him a man of so much intelligence and such elegant attainments. When, therefore, his uncle summoned him to leave, she joined with a cordiality that was not altogether feigned in his regrets at the necessity for departure. As they rose to go, Mr. Southwold said to Medora:

"Well, Miss Fielding, I think I shall be obliged to fulfil a conditional promise I made some time ago to Mrs. Clarkson."

"Indeed! what was that?"

"That I should give you a party when you came. The condition I will not mention; I will only say, you have more than complied with it."

Medora looked puzzled; but with instinctive tact forbore to urge an explanation. She merely said, "I am much obliged to you, sir; I am sure, from what I have heard Mrs. Clarkson say, a party at your house would be very delightful."

"It cannot be otherwise, I am sure, if it is graced by the presence of two such ladies," replied Mr. Southwold with a courtly bow; "but when shall it be?"

"Oh! Mr. Southwold," exclaimed Mrs. Clarkson, "don't have it just yet; mine must be first, and we will have ample time to settle the date by and by."

"As you please. I dare say my nephew will keep me informed of your engagements."

"With pleasure, if Mrs. Clarkson will permit it," said Floyd, eagerly seizing any pretext for frequent intercourse.

"To be sure I will, and from this time shall expect your daily ride to terminate here."

As she spoke, the carriage drove up, and the two gentlemen began to make their adieux. With true lover's instinct Floyd placed himself so as to shake hands first with Mr. Clarkson, then with Mrs. Clarkson, and last with Medora. Yet he approached her, hardly daring to hope for the favor. She had just honored Mr. Southwold with a friendly grasp, but then he was an old gentleman, and they were such recent acquaintances, he half hesitated as he bowed, but Medora, apparently as a matter of course, extended her hand. The momentary

pressure of those soft fingers, slight as it was, thrilled to his very heart, and he went off rejoicing that his manœuvre had been so successful, and that her electric clasp was the last that touched his hand. Was it any wonder that, in spite of the warning from Mr. Southwold, his dreams that night were of the fair γλαυκῶπις?

CHAPTER VIII.

"Love took up the glass of time, and tossed it in his glowing hands,
Every moment lightly shaken ran itself o'er golden sands."

Locksley Hall.—TENNYSON.

"I assert, with Mr. Dryden, that the Devil is the hero of Milton's poem; his plan, which he lays, pursues, and at last executes, being the subject of the poem."

CHESTERFIELD'S LETTERS.

To Floyd the hours of that next month went by on golden pinions. Every day he saw Medora, either at Lazy-Bank or the house of some mutual acquaintance, and each interview riveted more strongly the chains that bound him. He was dreaming that delicious dream of first love that comes but once in the fitful fever of life. Each moment of his existence was tinged with the rosy hue of the spell that held him in its bewitching enchantment. The time passed away from her was a blank only to be endured by reveries of which she was the theme; and in her presence it was happiness supreme merely to watch her every motion, and inhale the delicate perfume of her garments. But to talk with her, and to see those glorious eyes fixed upon him with the earnest, almost affectionate look they sometimes wore, or to clasp her waist and touch her hand in the dance, was a bliss so intoxicating that it

sent the hot blood boiling through his veins, and all but maddened him with the intense, passionate love he durst not as yet utter.

Mr. Southwold appeared very well satisfied with the state of affairs, encouraging his nephew's intimacy with her by every means in his power, so that Floyd was well content to sink deeper and deeper into the delicious entrancement, never doubting that he should have his uncle's consent to the alliance if he could obtain Medora's, and trusting, as all lovers do, that his affection would ultimately be requited.

And yet, blindly devoted as he was, she sometimes said and did things which startled him. He endeavored to attribute her conduct to defects of education; but still the thought would often force itself upon him, that his mother, who was his ideal of all feminine perfection, would not have been so harsh in her judgment of others, so sneeringly contemptuous of the mere external conventionalities of religion and virtue. There were many of his old, preconceived ideas which she shocked; many of those observances, which he had been brought up from his earliest infancy to respect, she disregarded. And yet Medora understood herself and others well enough to see the effect of this upon Floyd, but there was a fierce, impatient spirit within her that chafed at these restraints, and scorned concealment even at the risk of losing him, although this she considered scarcely possible, so confident was she in her own powers of fascination. Nor was this to be wondered at, for even when she was most cynical, and Floyd most warm in defending his position, a smile or a look could transform him at once into the fond adorer.

One dreamy afternoon, early in September, Floyd rode over to Lazy-Bank. He was engaged to a gentleman's dinner-party at six, and this, therefore, would be his only opportunity of seeing Medora that day. He was shown into the boudoir, a small room, consisting almost entirely of a huge bay-window, which looked out on the beautiful Hudson. The light reflected from the river fell in ripples on the flower-covered walls and fanciful furniture; there were several pictures in the room, all of them summer scenes, by sparkling fountains and clear streams; and the only sunbeam which penetrated the drawn blinds, fell on a bowl of gold-fish, and shimmered through the water on their burnished scales. The whole air of the apartment was deliciously cool and tranquil, and the spell was complete when Medora entered, robed in delicate muslin, her round arms bare, and her snowy shoulders veiled only with thin lace.

Their talk was for some time of the airy nothings of the day; at last it turned on that favorite theme of lovers—the evidences of individual tastes and traits.

"I have heard," said Medora, "that there are three questions, which, if honestly answered, will give the key to any character."

"Indeed! What are they?"

"I will tell you if you will give me leave to ask them."

"Certainly I will; I should be very glad to have my character analysed by you, so begin at once."

"You will answer me truly?"

"Of course; I believe it is my usual habit, especially when you are the querist."

"I hope so; well then, what flower do you prefer?"

Floyd reflected a moment, then replied, "The Water

Lily, it is so stately and pure, yet so lovingly dependent on its friendly element for support, and so modestly withdrawn behind its green leaves."

"Rather cold, however," said Medora. "Now, second —Who is your favorite poet?"

"English poet?"

"Of course, I do not understand either Latin or Greek."

"Milton, decidedly."

"I am disappointed at that."

"Why?"

"I will tell you, when you have answered the third question. In what period of the world, other than the present, would you prefer to have lived?"

"In ancient Greece, at Athens, during the age of Pericles."

"Horribly democratic," said Medora, laughing; "but on the whole you have answered like a good boy, which I have no doubt you are."

"Now it is my turn," began Floyd, "and first—What flower do you prefer?"

"The Tuberose; but don't be so tiresome as to ask the other two questions," said Medora, and no wonder she avoided inquiries, to which, had she been in the palace of Truth, she would have been forced to reply, that the passionate poetry of Byron touched more than any other a responsive chord in her heart, and that in some wild moments she had sighed for the gay licence of the dissolute court of Charles II. In order to divert Floyd's attention, she hastened to add, "Now I will tell you why I found fault with your choice of a poet. I do not in the least share your admiration for Milton."

"I am sorry for that; why not?"

"I think that although many of his verses are magnificent, beyond almost anything that has ever been written, they have been as a whole greatly overrated; in the first place, his expressions are often very obscure, and in the second place, I think he has done a great deal of harm."

"*Harm!* How?" exclaimed Floyd, who had been brought up to reverence Milton, as almost inspired.

"In this way, that his Paradise Lost, appearing just at that era when religious infatuation was at its climax, and any writer on sacred subjects was looked upon as an oracle, has come to be regarded as next to the Bible in authority, and the wild speculations contained in it accepted as truth."

"Excuse me," said Floyd, "but I must absolutely deny both your propositions. In the first place, I do not regard them as 'wild speculations,' and in the second place, I can see no injury possible from such a magnificent allegorical epic."

"What! you do not consider it hurtful to engraft false doctrine on true? It may not be necessary to salvation to disbelieve the battles of the angels, but it is certainly a terrible thing to disfigure what should be a pure faith with idle superstitions."

"But again, I repeat they are not 'idle superstitions.' Paradise Lost is merely an embodiment, in more extended form of facts, the authority for which is to be found in the Bible."

"You think so? Doubtless many others agree with you; now let us see how far your position is tenable. In the first place, what are your grounds for believing that the spirits of evil are fallen angels?"

"There are a great many texts which prove it conclusively, in the New Testament, especially in Revelations."

"But I was always taught that the Apocalypse was a prophecy of the future, and not a history of the past."

"So it is, both."

"It does not seem so to me; there is a sort of connexion even in its wildness, that would imply that it all has reference to one period."

"Even admitting that, there still remain evidences sufficient elsewhere. The strongest verse which now occurs to me is one in St. Peter, of which I do not perhaps recall the exact words, but it is very nearly this:

"'For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and bound them in chains of darkness to reserve them unto judgment.'

"Can you ask a stronger foundation for Milton's theory?"

"Undoubtedly," said Medora, a good deal staggered, "that is very conclusive, but," she added, ingeniously shifting the attack, "I do not like this way of taking solitary texts to prove a point. You can find authority for any known system of religion in the Bible by picking out a few words here and there, and stringing them together. But I have still another very great objection to the poem under discussion. Milton has been very justly styled the Christian Homer; he deserves the title too well; he represents the Almighty and His Son, too much like the mythological heroes, as actuated by the passions of men. Do you recollect what he says of the onslaught of the Saviour which caused the final overthrow of the rebel angels?"

"I do not remember the exact words."

"Let me give you a quotation then.

> '——— Full soon
> Among them he arrived, in his right hand
> Grasping ten thousand thunders which he sent
> Before him, such as in their souls infixed
> Plagues.'

Now is not that more appropriate to the wrathful Achilles than the Merciful Redeemer?"

Floyd paused a reply. There was something in the whole argument that shocked him inexpressibly, and he determined his answer should be a severe one. Medora, anxious to escape from a controversy in which she was likely to be worsted, availed herself of his momentary silence to rise from the low chair, where she had been sitting, and with an easy movement, to throw herself beside him on the sofa.

"My friend," said she, "we are terribly hypercritical for such a warm afternoon, come tell me who your letter is from?" and with the tip of her finger she touched an envelope, which appeared above his pocket.

The action, the words, the gesture drove every thought but passionate admiration from Floyd's mind, and she had to repeat the question before he replied.

"From my mother."

"I thought so, what does she say?"

"She says she longs to see me very much. I think I shall go to visit her soon."

"Visit her?" asked Medora, quickly; "then you consider it your home here."

"Almost, but I shall, of course, always spend a good part of my time with her."

"How soon do you leave?"

"I don't know; when do you go?"

"Not for a fortnight, yet."

"I shall certainly remain until then," replied Floyd.

"I hope so."

The words were simple, yet they so thrilled his breast that he longed to tell her all that was in it. He was only deterred by the thought which had often before occurred to him, that so long as he had no definite prospects for the future, he had no right to ask her to unite her fate with his. Yet his voice fairly trembled with suppressed emotion as he replied:

"Thank you; you do not know how much pleasure it gives me to hear you say so."

"I am glad of that," said Medora, softly; "be sure, I spoke from my heart."

Perhaps the barriers of honor that Floyd had set up might have been all swept away by the flood of passion these words aroused, but at that moment the little French timepiece on the mantel chimed the half hour past five, and reminded him that he had to ride home and dress before six. He rose at once, saying—

"I was fast forgetting all my duties in your presence, that clock has reminded me of them. I must go."

He held Medora's hand a moment longer than etiquette permits in bidding her good-bye, and the language of his eyes uttered all that his lips refused to speak. Was it imagination, or did those soft fingers half return his parting pressure? He durst not trust himself to think.

When he was gone Medora drew a long breath, that

resembled a sigh. "If I had only known him sooner!" she murmured, "so honest, so amiable, so devoted, I might have loved him once! It seems scarcely right to give in exchange for his warm true heart only the ashes of a burnt-out passion! *Right?* bah!"

CHAPTER IX.

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss within the cup,
And I'll not ask for wine."

The Forrest.—BEN JONSON.

"The summer webs that float and shine,
The summer dews that fall,
Tho' light they be, this heart of mine
Is lighter than them all."

MOORE'S MELODIES.

WHEN the homeward ride had somewhat cooled the fever of Floyd's blood, the contents of Mrs. Southwold's letter mingled with his thoughts even to the partial exclusion of Medora's image. Its cheerfulness was evidently forced. Although the expression of the wish to see him was coupled with an injunction not to come if it was inconvenient, he could see the irrepressible longing of the mother-heart, and determined to speak to his uncle upon the subject at the earliest opportunity.

The dinner party for the evening prevented it until the next morning, but when Mr. Southwold joined him in the library after breakfast, Floyd began—

"Uncle Southwold, I am beginning to think of going home."

"Don't say that, Floyd; you have twice before ex-

pressed yourself similarly, and I have told you that I wished you to consider this as your home."

"You are very kind, sir; but I ought to go and see my mother."

A frown crossed Mr. Southwold's brow, and he said, "Certainly, but not just yet." He paused a moment, reflectively, and then continued: "It is time that I should explain my wishes somewhat. You have now been with me nearly four months; during that time I have found you, in many respects, what I should have liked my son to be; you have become necessary to me; it is my desire that you always live with me. Twice a year you are at liberty to make your mother as long a visit as you choose; perhaps some time she may visit you here. I intend to make you an allowance hereafter."—Floyd tried to interrupt him. "You need not thank me; it is no more than right that your mother should be relieved from the burden of your support. Are you satisfied with this?"

"I assure you, sir," replied Floyd, in a tone of some emotion, "that I am deeply grateful for your kindness; but if I may venture to make a suggestion, I should be very glad if you will allow me to complete the study of my profession, and obtain admittance to the bar."

"You want to be an *Attorney*, sir?" asked Mr. Southwold, sharply. "What for?"

"In order that under any circumstances I may be independent."

Mr. Southwold looked hard at Floyd for a moment before he answered. "You unintentionally force me to explain myself still farther. I do not wish you to study law; the knowledge, without the practice of it, makes a

private gentleman litigious, without enabling him to defend his rights, and it will never be necessary for you to earn your living." He paused a moment, and continued with an evident effort. "You are aware, that legally you are my heir, as nearest of kin, in case—— in case I die intestate. I have never in my life made a will, and I do not intend to."

"My dear sir," exclaimed Floyd, with honest sincerity, "I am deeply grieved that anything I have said has induced you to speak on such painful subjects."

"No, Floyd; this conversation was necessary; I am glad we have had it; we will not refer to it again. You shall go to see your mother as soon as you like, but first I must give my promised party to Miss Fielding."

Uncle and nephew were soon deep in consultation as to the arrangements for the fête, which was fixed for the following Friday, Floyd riding over to Lazy-Bank in the afternoon, to obtain Medora's consent to the day selected.

On arriving there, and entering the drawing-room, he was a good deal disappointed to find visitors—the Misses Ashley, and a young cousin of Mrs. Clarkson's.

"I have come," said Floyd, as soon as the first greetings were over, "as ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary from Mr. Southwold to Miss Fielding, to know if she will graciously consent to allow him to give a ball in her honor, on Friday evening next?"

Medora.—"Miss Fielding is delighted to signify to Mr. Southwold her approbation of the time selected, and begs to present assurances of her most distinguished consideration,—unless her faithful friend and ally, Susan, has other views."

Mrs. Clarkson.—No, we have no engagements to interfere; I can see but one objection, and that is, that it is Friday."

Floyd.—"What! superstitious?"

Mrs. C.—"A little, perhaps."

Medora.—"Yes, indeed, Sue is dreadfully so; she will not sit at table with thirteen, or start on a journey, or begin anything else on Friday."

Mrs. C.—"I am certain to have ill-luck if I do. Why once I engaged two servants on that day—very much against my will I assure you, nothing but necessity compelled me to it—and before the week was out, one broke her arm and the other ran away with the footman."

Floyd.—"Wonderful coincidence! You really alarm me. Miss Fielding, shall we give it up on this account?"

Medora.—"I do not in the least care for omens myself, but let us be guided by the general opinion."

Miss Ashley.—"I should think that, in this case, something on the score of luck might be given up in consideration of the splendid moon we shall have on that evening."

Mrs. C.—"So there will be! I had forgotten that, and if we wait till next week the moon will be too old. Let it be Friday, then, by all means."

Floyd.—"Then it is settled."

Mrs. C.—"Absolutely decided;" then pointing to refreshments on the side table, "but how rude I am, we were so busy talking, I forgot to ask you if you would not take a glass of wine."

Floyd.—"Thank you, if Miss Fielding will do me the honor to join me in drinking success to the ball."

Medora.—"Certainly."

Rising, they approached the table together, and Floyd, filling the glasses as they raised them, said in a low voice, and with a significant look—

"Here's to the queen of the fête at Southwold."

Medora bowed with a smile, merely tasting the wine. Then ever mindful of the most punctilious courtesy, she disregarded Floyd's efforts to detain her in a low chat, and turned away to rejoin the other visitors.

He remained a moment at the table to finish his wine, but by an extraordinary error, it was Medora's glass and not his own that he emptied. With the flavor of the Sherry yet lingering on his lips, he took his leave and rode away home.

The next two days were busy in preparing and issuing the invitations for the party. The third, the fête day, in arrangements for the evening. There were several guests staying at Southwold. This, with the necessity for numerous long rides, alone prevented Floyd from either visiting Lazy-Bank again or speaking to his uncle on a subject which now lay very near his heart.

Although his acquaintance with Miss Fielding had been so brief, it really was much more intimate from their frequent intercourse than twice the length of time would have made it in town, and he considered it quite enough to warrant him in addressing her. Since his conversation with his uncle, his prospects were much brighter, and more settled than they had ever been before. But after his recent kindness he felt it incumbent upon him first to obtain Mr. Southwold's consent, although he had no doubt it would be readily granted.

At last, Friday evening came, and Floyd, tired with

his varied exertions, went out for a stroll. Looking around him at that fine old house, and the broad domain that was to be his inheritance, he dreamed bright dreams of the years to come, when he should dwell here with that fair woman to share his life. His heart swelled tumultuously with these rapturous hopes, forgetful or unheeding the warning of one of his favorite German proverbs—

"Die sonne scheint am hellsten bebor einen sturm."

CHAPTER X.

"The sounds that fall
Around, above,
Re-echo all
With love, with love,
With love, with love"

CRICHTON.

IT was a glorious night. The harvest moon poured down its flood of white radiance on the dark woods, heavy with the lush greenness of late summer, and flashed in silver sparkles from the dusky waters of the rolling river. In the deep azure of the sky the evening star alone, for a brief season, disputed the sovereignty of the heavens with the pale Queen of night, and then sank overwhelmed in the lingering crimson of the west. Yet not often has Venus faded before Diana. The rough hills were shrouded in black masses of shadow, illumined only on their highest peaks with a trembling light, as if the chaste huntress was there keeping her watch for the beautiful Endymion.

Southwold was gorgeous that evening. All around the house the trees were gay with many-tinted lamps, although the thicker woods were left to the mysterious lights and shades of the ghostly moonbeams. The piazzas were bordered with blossoming shrubs, and inside there were wreaths of flowers festooning the staircase

and halls, and vases of bouquets on every table and mantel where there could be found space to set them. The great saloon was cleared for dancing, and the music of the band stole through the open windows, and rang out in echoing cadences on the still night. The air had that soft and enervating warmth that sometimes pervades our early September days; and inside the house, and out of it, everywhere the atmosphere was heavy with the voluptuous perfume of the tuberose. With each inspiration of that powerful fragrance, Floyd thought of her who had said it was her favorite flower; and as he looked at the queenly stalks, with their perfect blossoms clustering around them, and inhaled the intoxicating sweetness of their odorous breath, it seemed to him no inappropriate emblem of that woman, at once so beautiful and so fascinating.

Driving towards the party, through the solemn moonlight, Medora Fielding was pondering on what would be the best means to induce Floyd to offer himself to her at once. It had been her settled determination, for some time past, to be at least engaged, if not married, before Lascelles returned from Europe. It mattered little to whom, so long as the *parti* was rich. Still, of course, she preferred that he should be young and handsome. As she imagined that Floyd possessed the first of these qualifications, and knew that he had the last two, she considered him a peculiarly desirable alliance; and, therefore, when she reached the dressing-room, while apparently absorbed in the arrangement of her hair before the mirror, she was, in reality, thinking what would be her surest course to bring her last month's flirtation to a speedy and satisfactory close. It would

seem that the result of her meditations was pleasing, for there was a triumphant smile on her lips as she turned from the contemplation of her own fair image, though could she have seen the thrill of delight which convulsed Floyd's heart when they met, she would have felt that it needed no promise to prevent him from forgetting her.

She was lovely that night, for when was she not? She was one of those women, who, every time you see them, impress you with the idea of being particularly well dressed. Her friends were constantly, and with sincerity, complimenting her on her costume. Although her taste was perfect when she had the money for its gratification, it was her superb beauty that caused whatever she wore to appear to be exactly what was most becoming. So on this occasion, although the light folds of her rose-colored drapery harmonized admirably with her faultless blonde complexion, and sunny hair, it was not to that she owed her superiority over every other woman in the room, but to her own surpassing loveliness.

The ball went on gloriously. The hours—those golden hours, wherein love and beauty reign triumphant, sped away on magic wings; and Floyd, from his multifarious duties as host, had as yet no opportunity for speaking to Medora, beyond a few passing words. During the supper he succeeded in engaging her hand for the next dance, which she whispered she had been reserving for him. The moment he was released from his hospitable attendance at the table he went to join her, and was a good deal disappointed to find it not a polka or waltz, but only a quadrille.

"Do you think our *vis-à-vis* handsome?" inquired Medora in the last figure, indicating a tall, stylish girl, with more intelligence than amiability in the expression of her decidedly striking face.

"Rather," said Floyd. "Who is she; for I did not catch her name when I was presented?"

"It is Miss Henrietta Murray. She has been quite a belle, although they call her a great flirt. She is very frank about it, however: she openly avows that she never intends to marry, and says she has taken for her motto the celebrated advice of Washington, in his farewell address—'Friendly relations with all, entangling alliances with none.' But I imagine she is only waiting for some man who shall combine two requirements rather difficult to unite—birth and wealth."

"And do you consider those the two most desirable attributes for a husband to possess?"

"By no means," replied Medora, turning upon him those glorious eyes, full of eloquent softness. "In my estimation there are other qualities far more valuable—youth, beauty, and, above all, love." She held out her hand as she spoke, but before he could answer, added, "I believe it is our turn to dance."

Small blame to Floyd if he endeavored to convey a suitable reply in the ardent clasp of her yielding fingers. But before the quadrille was over and the music had ceased, he remembered his resolution not to address her without consulting his uncle, and heroically determined to adhere to it. Yet ten minutes later, when the next dance began, her partner searched the house and piazzas for her in vain. It was dangerous temerity for Floyd to stroll with her up and down that lonely walk, and

absolute foolhardiness to seat himself beside her in the tempting seclusion of that vine-covered arbor. It looked towards the west, and the moonlight shone full into it, falling in silver flakes over Medora's snowy shoulders and arms, and gleaming with a pallid radiance on the pearls that rested on her bosom, and rose and fell with every undulation of her heaving breast.

"It seems to me," said Medora, "that I never saw so perfect a night. I am sure I shall always remember this as one of the pleasantest evenings I ever passed."

"I think the party has gone off well," replied Floyd, "but I have not enjoyed myself much until *now*."

Medora made no reply, except by glancing towards him as he spoke; then slowly dropping her eyes under his ardent gaze, a delicate blush suffusing her cheek.

"Miss Medora," continued Floyd, "I have a great favor to ask you; will you promise to grant it?"

"Unless it is very difficult, I shall, certainly."

"Will you select for me a rosebud from this vine on the arch; so that I may always keep it as a memento of this evening, and especially of this glorious scene?"

"With pleasure. That is a very simple request. I would do much more for a friend like you," said Medora, rising and drawing off her glove. She chose out what appeared in the uncertain light to be a beautiful blossom, and reseating herself, began, with busy fingers, to arrange it.

"I am breaking off all the thorns," she said, "so that when you see it, there may be nothing disagreeable about it, to recall one unpleasant circumstance in your remembrance of this evening."

"You are very kind," said Floyd, earnestly; "and

although I need no reminder to think of you, I shall prize it far more than I have the power to express."

"There now, it is very sweet," said Medora, and she extended it to him. Floyd leaned forward to take the rose. He could not resist the temptation to touch the hand that held it. The trembling fingers were not withdrawn, and, in another instant, it was imprisoned within his own, and he was covering it with burning kisses.

This was a dangerous pleasure. It roused within him such a tornado of passion as swept away every thought but love—intense, irresistible, unconquerable. And this was not the first time that the arguments of feeling have outweighed all other considerations, even honor and life. For since that olden time when the mighty Samson was unable to reserve the secret that was his power from the wiles of the fair Delilah, down to the days when Le Grand Monarque reckoned truly that the fascinations of a beautiful French woman would win from his English cousin concessions greater than the most subtle diplomacy, there has ever been more magic in a woman's touch than in all the spells of enchantment, and more eloquence in a woman's voice than in the noblest periods that have been rounded since Demosthenes.

"Oh! my own Medora!" murmured Floyd, as his arm stole round her yielding waist.

In that intoxicating moment, he heard and saw nothing but the beautiful girl beside him, and did not notice that figures were rapidly approaching the arbor. Fortunately for himself, Medora was less absorbed than her lover. She checked the mad words on his lips, and

started from his embrace just as a clear, ringing voice called:

"Medora! Medora! Is Miss Fielding there?"

"What is it, Sue?" she said, stepping forward and meeting Mrs. Clarkson at the entrance.

Floyd had an instant to recover himself, yet he still trembled with the wild thrill of that caress.

"We must go at once," said Mrs. Clarkson, hurriedly. "Don't you see how dark the sky is? It will rain in half an hour."

Then Floyd perceived, for the first time, that the moon, which before had looked down upon them with mild radiance, had now hidden her sad face behind heavy clouds, so that a funereal blackness enveloped the scene, a moment ago so bright.

"I have hunted for you everywhere," continued Mrs. Clarkson, petulantly. "Come! Mr. Southwold, you *must* hurry!"

There was no opportunity for further conversation when they reached the house. There was a rapid robing of the ladies, a hasty good-night, and the guests speedily departed.

Floyd acquitted himself of his final duties like one walking in a dream. He was still delirious with the remembrance of that blissful moment. When he reached his room, his first thought was to draw from its hiding-place the rose which Medora had given him. As he held it up to the light, he was struck with horror to see half the leaves fallen off, and at its heart a ghastly worm.

CHAPTER XI.

"Do as thee list—
Kepe thine honour and kepe eke mine estate."
Waife of Bathes.—CHAUCER.

"C'est amour, c'est amour, c'est ley seul ie le sens
Mais le plus vif amour, le poison la plus forte
A qui oncq pauvre coeur ait ouverte la porte."
Sonnets.—MONTAIGNE.

AFTER a night that was full of dreams and reveries of future happiness, Floyd rose with the resolution of at once informing his uncle that he was about to address Miss Fielding. Going down stairs he ordered his horse for the earliest hour at which etiquette would permit a visit to Lazy-Bank, and then sought out Mr. Southwold and requested a few moments' private conversation with him after breakfast.

The meal passed off rather constrainedly, for Floyd's thoughts were busy with his coming interview. He felt an awkward embarrassment at the avowal he was about to make to his uncle, and when the library door closed upon them he found himself becoming very much confused, a state of mind which was not relieved by Mr. Southwold's abrupt—

"Well, sir, what is it?"

With a heroic effort Floyd overcame his reluctance to approach the delicate subject, and replied—

"I wish to consult you on a matter of the deepest interest to my future happiness. You have, doubtless, noticed my attentions to Miss Fielding; I had hoped, indeed, that you did not disapprove of them."

"Certainly not, I always like to see a man of your age fond of society; I presumed, of course, that there was nothing serious in them."

"You are very much mistaken, sir; it is my wish, with your consent, to address her."

Mr. Southwold's brow darkened, and he asked harshly—

"Are you engaged to her?"

"No, sir," replied Floyd; "I would not take so important a step without consulting you."

"That was right," said Mr. Southwold, a little softened; "then, as you are not in honor bound, there is no harm done, for I am extremely averse to your marrying."

"What are your objections, sir?" demanded Floyd, much surprised.

"To the young lady, none in the world; but, my old bachelor habits are very fixed, and I do not like to have them interfered with; for that reason I have never had any lady visitors here, and to have even *your* wife and children, permanently, would be an annoyance I could not think of for a moment. I am confident this is a passing fancy which you will soon overcome."

"I assure you, sir," answered Floyd, calmly, "you are entirely mistaken; this is no boyish passion to be lightly resigned."

"My dear fellow, you talk as all young men do; go home and see your mother, a few weeks' absence will put an end to all this."

Floyd rose. "You have been very kind to me, uncle," he said, with dignity, "and for your sake I would sacrifice much, but do not ask me to relinquish my hopes of happiness with Miss Fielding."

"Since you treat the matter so seriously," replied Mr. Southwold, coldly, "I will answer you in the same tone; you may go and offer yourself to the young lady, if she refuses you well and good, there will then be no harm done; if she accepts you, you may return here if you like, but the moment you are married your allowance ceases, and this is no longer your home. Although, unless you commit some worse offence, it shall make no difference in your inheritance."

"I shall comply with your suggestions, sir," said Floyd, bowing. "I thank you for your consideration."

Half an hour afterwards Floyd was on his way to Lazy-Bank. He rode rapidly, vainly endeavoring to suppress the bitter feelings which this conversation with Mr. Southwold had aroused. Those few cold words had dashed to the ground all the delightful imaginings which had made his future so bright. The huge selfishness which he had before half suspected to be one of his uncle's distinguishing characteristics, now thrust itself upon him in all its naked deformity; he saw the outward kindness of the past four months in its real light, as only shown him because his cheerful society formed an agreeable relief from his sometimes lonely existence. Mr. Southwold wished his nephew to remain unmarried,

that he might never be annoyed by the restraint of a lady's presence, and that his own comfort might always be the paramount consideration. He was willing to sacrifice to his selfish gratification all Floyd's hopes of that domestic life in which every young man expects to find his truest happiness.

Only the night before, Floyd had received from the woman who was dearer to him than anything else in the world, such encouragement as warranted him in supposing that his honest love was returned. He had thought then that he could offer her a home worthy of her acceptance; but now, he could only ask her to share with him the obscurity of poverty. It seemed to him, with his nobly disinterested nature, selfish and cruel to wish her, who was so well fitted to adorn society, to resign all for him; and had he not felt that his own honor and his respect for her absolutely required him to complete the avowal last night trembling on his lips, he would have willingly suffered in silence, and never permitted himself the sweet pleasure of declaring his love.

While awaiting Medora in the boudoir at Lazy-Bank, his restless excitement was such, that he could scarcely remain quietly seated. She came in, looking a shade paler than usual, and met him with an embarrassment in her manner almost equal to his own. Little did he suspect the weary vigil she had kept last night, in endeavoring to school herself to the calm contemplation of accepting the offer that she felt sure would the next day be made, or that she met him with the deliberate intention of not committing herself until she was well assured that his worldly prospects were as brilliant as she had been led to suppose.

Floyd ventured to seat himself beside her on the sofa, and then with trembling lips began:—

"Miss Medora, you can readily guess that since last night all my thoughts have been full of you, and that I have come here this morning to tell you how much I love you." Then glancing at her downcast eyes, he went on hurriedly. "Do not condemn my selfishness, though I have nothing now to give you but a true and faithful heart. I should not have ventured to address you had I not been, until to-day, ignorant of my real situation."

The color which his words had ripened to a blush in Medora's cheeks faded slowly away, and she released herself from the trembling arm that he had stolen about her waist. At this act, Floyd, who had paused, awaiting her reply in breathless silence, exclaimed passionately:—

"Oh, Medora, do not repulse me; only, for pity's sake, tell me that you love me a little."

She glanced at his convulsed features, and touched by the depth of real feeling they expressed, said gently—

"My friend, do not agitate yourself so much; let us speak calmly on this subject, so important to us both."

"I will do anything you choose," replied Floyd, with more composure, "if you will only tell me that you love me."

Withou noticing this appeal, Medora asked:

"Why do you talk of your selfishness towards me? I have ever found you a thoughtful friend."

"I trust I should always be that," said Floyd, tenderly, "but I am distressed that I am not wealthy, and that I

can only offer you an honorable name, and the slender pittance of my patrimony."

"What!" exclaimed Medora, astonished, "are you not your Uncle's heir?"

"Yes," answered Floyd, reluctantly, "I believe I shall be under any circumstances, but he does not wish me to marry, and I must lose my home with him if I do."

In an instant Medora saw all that was before her—the tedious waiting for an old man's death, the false position that must always arise from slender means and great expectations, and the possibility of wasting the best years of her life, in the same struggle against circumstances of which she was already so weary. With that consummate tact that never deserted her, she seized at once the most honorable escape from her dilemma, by answering:

"And you were willing to relinquish all your present advantages for me? That was very noble, but it is a sacrifice I cannot permit; do not ask me to love you; henceforth, let us meet only as friends, and try to forget that you ever regarded me in any other light."

Floyd thought with a bitter pang of his Uncle's cruelty, that rendered him deserving of this mild reproof, as he answered sadly:

"Oh, Medora! you know that you will always be dearer to me than my life, but I thank you for reminding me of my selfish presumption in wishing you to share my poverty; my only excuse is in the great love that is breaking my heart. Oh, forgive me! My punishment is sufficiently severe, I thank God you do not share it!"

"I have nothing to forgive," said Medora gently, at the same time extending her hand.

Floyd raised it to his lips, and wild with love and despair, began with passionate words to endeavor to win from her some acknowledgment of a preference, some hope for the future. But Medora rose quickly and checked his impetuosity.

"Do not urge me to say what would be worse than useless; you must go; it is unwise to prolong an interview which is only painful, and we had better not meet again until we have both forgotten what would perhaps be dangerous for either of us to remember."

Floyd durst not trust himself to speak. With trembling earnestness, he pressed her hand for the last time, and choking back the bitter tears that were blinding him, hurried from the house. He mounted his horse, and, without looking back, rode rapidly away from the scene of his late enchantment. He strove to relieve his excitement in the rapid motion of his wild gallop, and plunged on through the most unfrequented paths.

So the spell was broken, the dream was over, and the sweet summer idyl rudely ended!

The fair prospects which had brightened his life only yesterday were as much changed as the face of nature by the last night's storm. In his heart all was ruin and gloom, and around him the scene was in harmony with his wretchedness. The clouds still hung dark and lowering, a cutting wind moaned through the trees, all the way was strewn with leaves and branches, twisted off by the tempest; the whole aspect of the day was sad and dreary. Hours passed in reckless wanderings, and although he left Lazy-Bank while it was yet morning, as

he drew near Southwold the short autumnal twilight was darkening to its close.

He met his uncle in the hall.

"Have you dined, Floyd?" he asked; then noticing his nephew's downcast looks and disordered dress, he added in a low tone:

"I need not ask you how you have sped in your wooing; your pale face tells its own tale. I thought she would refuse you if you told her you had no money!" he closed, triumphantly.

Floyd was roused, and replied fiercely: "I assure you, sir, the grounds of Miss Fielding's rejection of my suit are such as do her honor. I prefer not to have the subject alluded to."

"Certainly, my dear fellow; henceforth I am dumb. You shall start for Stratford to-morrow; the change will benefit you."

CHAPTER XII.

"Is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill, is this the kirk,
Is this mine own countree?"

Ancient Mariner.—COLERIDGE.

"Mother, dearest mother,
May I then talk to thee as I was wont?"

Prometheus Unbound.—SHELLEY.

WHEN Floyd reached Stratford, the sun had set, and the whole west was dyed with a pale amber. The evening was chilly, and as he walked from the station to his mother's house, the wind sighed drearily through the tall elms, whose leaves had already lost the vivid green of midsummer, although as yet no frost had come to tint them with the short-lived glories of autumn.

He had not written to say on what day he should arrive, and when he reached the house, he entered unannounced, and made his way to the little parlor. There was no one there, but a cheerful wood fire burned upon the hearth, and Nannie's pet kitten lay lazily purring on the rug. The whole aspect of the room was charmingly suggestive of the recent presence of ladies, something which was entirely wanting amid the elegance of Southwold. There was his mother's wicker work-

stand, with a wonderful piece of knitting lying upon it, and Nannie's little basket, full of delicate muslin and lace. A vase of dahlias arranged with artistic regard to contrast of color was on the table, and beside it lay a book with a prettily embroidered mark on the open page.

Floyd regarded all this with loving eyes, and felt a sense of comfort in the idea that he was near the one woman who really loved him better than all the world beside. But there was none of that bounding joy with which he had expected to return, before his recent disappointment. Indeed, he felt as if he never again should be as happily hopeful as he had been only four months ago.

It was but a few moments he was alone, when the door opened, and his mother and Nannie, who had been at their early tea, entered the room.

"Why, *Floyd!*" cried Mrs. Southwold, her face flushing with delight, as she hastened forward to clasp her son in her arms.

Nannie turned very pale when she first saw him, then a faint blush overspread her face, which deepened to crimson as he bent down to claim the cousin's privilege of a kiss. When they were seated, and Mrs. Southwold had an opportunity to look steadily at her son, she was struck with horror at his changed appearance, and exclaimed:

"My dear boy, how pale you are! Have you been ill?"

"No, mamma," he replied, with a smile intended to be cheerful, "there is nothing the matter with me; I am quite well, I assure you."

This answer by no means satisfied his mother, whose anxiety was considerably increased when she found that although he made an effort to do justice to the excellent supper she had hastened to have prepared, it was very evident he had anything but the appetite of a traveller.

Once more cosily seated in the parlor, Floyd spoke much of his uncle's kindness to him, and talked of making Southwold his permanent home as a settled and most desirable arrangement. Of course his mother was well pleased at these many flattering tokens of esteem, and the brilliant prospects which she fancied were opening before him; but she could not repress a feeling of dreary sadness at the thought of giving up for the future the companionship of her only son. Yet she tried not to deepen Floyd's evident melancholy, which she imagined might arise from a similar regret, and she spoke of it cheerfully.

"Well, dear," she said, addressing her niece, "your mother will have to let you be my little girl always if Floyd goes away."

Nannie, who had been watching her cousin with eager eyes, said timidly, "You know, aunty, I had rather be with you than anywhere else; but won't Floyd ever come back?"

"I hope he will, my dear, very often," replied Mrs. Southwold, suppressing a sigh.

When the young girl had retired, the mother and son sat long talking together, but Floyd never once alluded to the subject that lay nearest his heart. He hoped she did not notice his depression of spirits, and felt a morbid reluctance to make known his secret despair to any one, preferring to brood over it in silence.

He little suspected the bitter tears which his fond parent shed when she was alone at the change which had come over her darling boy, and at the thought that he should have any sorrow which he either would not or could not permit her to share.

Poor lady! this was but the first sad hour which Floyd's altered appearance and strange reserve cost her; for days and weeks passed on, and still he never spoke of the disappointment that clouded his life, until Mrs. Southwold often thought bitterly that he had far better remained in his peaceful home, to struggle on as formerly, than be the heir of Southwold at the loss of all his light-heartedness. He was as unlike his former self as possible. He would sit for hours absorbed in sad reveries, and look up with a start when addressed. Even his favorite books had lost their power to interest him; and he passed much of his time in long, solitary rambles.

On these walks he shunned even the companionship of Nannie. It was piteous to see the sad, disappointed look that would come over her sweet face when she had placed herself in the porch, hat in hand, in the hope of his asking her to join him, and he passed her by without noticing her wistful expression.

One October afternoon, when Floyd had been in Stratford some six weeks, he went out, directly after their early dinner, and walked on through the woods, where the sunlight glanced dazzlingly on the now golden leaves of the tall elms, until he came, after a weary ramble, to the beach. The mellow sunbeams sparkled in the tiny waves, that fell with a low whisper on the sands. On one side the tall lighthouse rose from its

rocky base gaunt against the sky. Here and there a white sail dotted the deep azure of the sea, and in the far distance the misty shores of Long Island stretched in a dark line against the horizon. There was nothing bold or striking in the scene; but it was one Floyd loved to gaze upon, for it was associated with many of his happiest hours since infancy. He lay looking at it with a feeling of utter listlessness, until, lulled by the drowsy murmurs of the waters, he sank to sleep. For many nights past he had tossed restlessly through the weary hours, unable to drive away the sad thoughts that haunted him, and now, completely worn out, he slumbered heavily.

The sun went down in a glory of crimson and orange, but its splendors faded from the sky, the pale stars stole out one by one, the twilight darkened over the earth, and still he slept; already the damp night dews began to fall, mingling with a thick, grey mist, that crept up from the sea, enveloping the shore and the rocks in its cold, moist cloud, when a light touch on the shoulder roused him, and he heard a soft voice say—

"Cousin Floyd, you had better wake up and come home. You will be chilled if you lie here."

It seemed that his absence, unusually prolonged, had rendered his mother exceedingly uneasy, and Nannie had volunteered to find the wanderer and bring him home. What unerring instinct was it that led her all those three tiresome miles to where he slept?

"Why, cousin!" exclaimed Floyd, starting up, "how came you here?"

"You were gone so long I thought you must be on the beach," answered Nannie; "and when I saw you

asleep I was afraid you would be made ill by the exposure."

"And you came all this way alone? How very kind of you to find me, dear child," said Floyd, as he drew her arm within his own. In the gathering darkness he did not see the blush his words called up, neither could he know how happy they made her.

On their way home Floyd talked but little, but what he did say was very kind; and his silence arose not from moroseness, but from contrition. This act of his little cousin's brought to his mind suddenly all the anxiety which his frequent absences must have cost both her and his mother. He saw how selfish and cruel had been his conduct for the past month, and determined to make all the atonement in his power.

That night, when he was alone with his mother, Floyd told her all; how he had wooed that beautiful woman, and how he had staked the happiness of his whole life on winning her love, and lost. Mrs. Southwold listened with a sweet sympathy that was inexpressibly comforting to his wounded heart. But although, when the story was ended, she was greatly relieved to find that his depression sprang from no unworthy act on his part, as she sometimes had horribly suspected, yet she knew, as what parent does not, when either a son or a daughter finds a lover, that never again could she be first in her child's affections. To a widow this thought is peculiarly painful, and no wonder Mrs. Southwold entertained no very kind feelings towards the woman who had robbed her of her son's devotion, and brought the first cloud that had ever risen between them.

From this time she was unwearied in her endeavors

to win him from his sadness, and Floyd was so affected by her patient and untiring devotion that, for her sake, he strove to be always cheerful. At first it was a great and painful effort, but after a while he became less poignantly wretched, and the last few weeks of his stay at Stratford were, if not happy, at least tranquil.

When he had been there some two months, his Uncle's letters urging him to return, became very frequent and pressing. Floyd could not bear to leave his peaceful home and go back to the scene of his broken dream, where everything reminded him of his disappointment, and therefore sought one pretext after another, to delay his departure. At first he found an unanswerable excuse in the absence of Nannie, who went home for a short time to visit her parents and obtain their permission to remain with Mrs. Southwold, at least for another year. But when she returned with a letter from her mother, giving her entirely into the charge of "Kind aunt Ellen," and Mr. Southwold wrote again to say, that now that winter had fairly set in, he must absolutely *insist* upon the return of his nephew, it was impossible for Floyd to linger, and once more his mother was obliged to consent to his leaving her for an indefinite period of absence.

Had she possessed the power of the fabled Sybil to foresee all that was to pass ere they met again, would she have bidden him Godspeed with a cheery heart? or would she rather have clung around his neck, imploring him, with passionate supplications, never again to dare the fatal atmosphere of Southwold?

CHAPTER XIII.

"The iron rod of penury still compels
Her wretched slave to bow the knee to wealth."
Queen Mab.—SHELLEY.

"Even love and hatred respect the past, for the cause must have been before the effect."
Rasselas.—DR. JOHNSON.

FROM the moment when she parted from Floyd Southwold, with such apparent regret, Medora Fielding had been impatient to leave Lazy-Bank. She missed his devoted attentions and agreeable society more than she had supposed possible, and she did not care to linger amid the ruins of the *chateau en Espagne* she had recently been building. Her annoyance at this disappointment was excessive; all the greater, because she had no one but herself to blame for indulging in a degree of intimacy, that bordered on danger, with a young man who was entirely ineligible. Then, too, only five months yet remained before the period fixed upon for the return of Lascelles and his wife. This, more than anything else, made her anxious to leave the scene of a now useless conquest, and make another effort in a wider field. When, therefore, about a week later she took up the paper and saw among the arrivals from Europe that of Mr. Claude Hamilton, the old admirer of

whom Lascelles had professed a jealousy, and whom she knew to be a man of large and established fortune, she hastened her arrangements for departure, and bidding her kind hostess farewell returned to New York.

It was very trying to Medora to find herself once more in the cramped rooms which were her home, with no immediate prospect of exchanging them for a handsome establishment. Her mother, who had been spending the period of her daughter's absence among her own relations, was as much provoked as Medora herself at the poor result of the summer's campaign, and reminded her more frequently than was agreeable that this was her third season. Thus a thousand causes combined to render her desperately resolute to succeed in the capture of the new prize that she had selected.

Oh! deplorable result of a false education, that a young woman of Medora's talents and resources, should consider that any circumstances justified her in stooping to such miserable meanness!

It seemed that this conquest was not destined to be very difficult of accomplishment, for from the moment of her return Mr. Hamilton paid her the most marked attention. Yet, despite all her resolves, Medora sometimes felt sick at heart when she contemplated this man, and thought that she might one day have to call him Lord. There was something about him intensely repulsive to her, for although possessed of considerable personal beauty he was cold and egotistic, very rigid in his ideas of propriety, and forcing every one who came in contact with him to bend to his imperious will. He admired her simply because she was acknowledgedly the handsomest woman in the city.

Regarding himself—considering everything, birth, wealth, and good looks—as the most desirable young man in New York, he was determined also to have the most desirable wife—carefully paying his attentions only where the recipient of them would do him honor. Never for a moment doubting that any lady to whom he chose to extend his hand would thankfully accept it, he resolved, after a six months' trial of Medora, in case during that time he saw no reason to alter his opinions respecting her, graciously to espouse her.

With ready tact she speedily discovered that the only way to captivate him was by a deference and submission of manner, intensely galling to her proud spirit. Often after one of his visits, which were sometimes tediously long, she would pace up and down, giving vent in passionate words to her indignation at his patronizing familiarities, only consoling herself with the thought of the sweet revenge she might have when he was once fairly within her power.

In this state of half slavery the time rolled on until it was winter, and wanted but a few weeks of Christmas. One night Mr. Hamilton waited on Medora to the Opera. She sat beside him feeling as she always did when they were in public together, as if she was paraded for his benefit, and looking at him occasionally with such glances as the captive Zenobia might have bestowed on the victorious Aurelian when she graced his triumph.

In an adjoining box to theirs sat Miss Murray, dispensing her smiles among a group of admirers with the haughty condescension that was one of her distinguishing characteristics. After watching her for some time Mr. Hamilton turned to Medora and said—

"Do you know I admire Miss Murray vastly? there is something so queenly about her."

"She is certainly handsome," answered Medora, acquiescing as usual.

"So handsome," continued Mr. Hamilton, with a look intended to be tender, "that there is but one woman in New York whom I prefer to her. By the way, do you think she really was engaged to that young Spaniard who was so attentive to her two months ago?"

"Oh, no, I presume it was a mere flirtation."

"I do not like even that," observed Mr. Hamilton majestically. "When I marry I shall select a woman of whom no living man has it in his power to say 'she once loved me.'"

An imperceptible smile flitted across Medora's face, but she answered softly:

"I am sure, Mr. Hamilton, that she who is so fortunate as to win you will bring a fresh heart to one so well able to appreciate it."

Mr. Hamilton regarded her complacently, suspecting no hidden sneer.

After all, the wisest of us are but blind fools in the hands of witty women. How little can even the most penetrating man suspect the thoughts that are surging under the placid surface of a fair face! Do you think that when your wife laughs and talks with you so gaily at the opera she is intent only on whiling away the *entr'acte*, and does not know that her pretty dimples and white teeth are enslaving young Lovelace opposite?

From that evening Mr. Hamilton seemed to consider Medora as already his own, treating her in private as if

there was a tacit understanding between them, and in public as if she entirely belonged to him. This was intensely annoying to her, as while he really was not committed by any direct word, the rumor was constantly gaining ground among her friends, that she was engaged to him. Then, too, she chafed uneasily under the constant watch he kept upon her slightest action, as if critically observing her, to see if in all respects she fulfilled his views of what the future Mrs. Hamilton should be. Indeed, it was often very difficult for her to subdue her high animal spirits down to the staid sobriety he required.

Her irritation at his conduct, and the trying position in which it placed her, reached its climax when she one day heard that Mr. Wentworth had, while apparently in his usual health, been struck with paralysis, and that Mr. and Mrs. Lascelles had been at once summoned home and were expected to return immediately.

During the few weeks that yet elapsed before their arrival she summoned all her fascinations to bring affairs between Mr. Hamilton and herself to some definite conclusion, but nothing that she could do either by adroit flattery or unwearied complaisance had the desired effect. Not that he was so indifferent to the bewitching charms of his beautiful mistress, as not to give her that selfish admiration which in his character stood for love, but he had his own reasons for not wishing to become engaged until the trial months were passed; and when once he had taken a resolve, not the goddess of passion herself, when armed with all the powers of her *cestus*, could have induced him to swerve from it. So Medora had the mortification of finding herself still in the same inde-

finite position when the steamer arrived that brought Lascelles and his young wife back to New York.

Notwithstanding the alarming nature of his seizure, Mr. Wentworth had so far recovered from it that he was able to meet his daughter at the door himself with assurances of his safety. Yet the old man's perceptions must have been somewhat dimmed by his recent illness, or he would have noticed that after the first rapture of meeting her beloved parent, and finding him so much better than she dared hope, had passed away, there was a sad look of despondency on Lucy's sweet face. This might be in a measure due to the natural apprehensiveness with which she, in common with every woman, must look forward to that trying hour which precedes the joys of maternity, but this scarcely accounted for the expression of settled despondency and disappointment that had stolen half the charm from her once animated features.

With the dignity of a true woman, she endeavored to conceal the secrets of her married life, never alluding to the long lonely hours she had endured, in the gay European capital, while Lascelles was passing his time in dissipations disgraceful to any man, doubly so to a young husband in the first year of marriage. Nor did her kind father ever know that the large sums of money he had taken such delight in sending her, had not been spent, as he fondly fancied, in gratifying her own delicate and refined tastes, but taken thanklessly and squandered in scenes and upon companions whose very names were pollution.

Yet after her return, despite her husband's carelessness, Lucy was happier than she had been since the first weeks of her honeymoon, before he tired of her sweet face and

fond devotion; for she had no longer, in addition to the secret sorrow of knowing that her intense love was but poorly requited, the wretched feeling of a stranger in a strange land. She was once more with her kind father in her own home, and surrounded by familiar faces.

Of course, all her friends hastened to welcome her back, and among them came Medora. Anxious to know how that first year of marriage, which is said to be the test of all the rest, had passed to her fortunate rival, she selected an early hour for her visit, and was shown up-stairs to Mrs. Lascelles' boudoir.

It needed but a glance at the careworn expression that had settled on that sweet face, to satisfy her that the triumph had not been a happy one, and to suggest the involuntary thought that perhaps she was the secret cause.

Of course Medora came to see Lucy, fully prepared to meet her husband unflinchingly, and not many minutes had elapsed, when her quick ear caught a footfall approaching, whose well known accents made her heart beat despite her resolves, and in another instant Lascelles stood before her.

Entering abruptly, and supposing his wife to be entirely alone, the shock of meeting thus the only woman he had ever loved was too much for his self-possession. He turned pale, and paused suddenly in the doorway. Lucy was extremely surprised at this strange conduct, and looked inquiringly from her husband to Medora, who betrayed no emotion beyond an almost imperceptible change of color. After an embarrassing pause, she said, timidly:

"Walter, this is Miss Fielding; I thought you knew her."

"I have had the pleasure of Mr. Lascelles' acquaintance, formerly," said Medora, with a soft smile, "but he is quite excusable in forgetting me."

By this time, Lascelles had recovered himself, and came forward, with a muttered curse at his own awkwardness.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Fielding, but I did not expect to find any one here. Lucy knows that I think she should always receive her visitors in the drawing-room, and not give them the trouble of coming upstairs," he added, indulging a habit he had long ago formed of blaming his wife, whatever occurred.

Lucy colored violently, at the thoughtless harshness of his tone. "I did not feel well. I was anxious to see Medora," she faltered.

Poor girl! She would so have liked to have him show her some of the tenderness of the bridegroom in the presence of her friend. She could not help regarding Medora's hasty attempts to shield her from censure, as more of an insult than a comfort, and was forced to make a strong effort to keep back her tears.

Unfortunately for herself, Lucy had never been anything more than sweet-looking, and she was plainer than usual now that ill-health had robbed her of her former brilliancy of complexion, and that from a partly excusable negligence, she had fallen into a careless habit of dress. The contrast between her and Medora, whose cheeks were glowing and eyes sparkling with health, while her toilette was as usual unexceptionable, was very great. No wonder that it struck Lascelles. But that was no

excuse for his openly-expressed admiration for Medora, and the many compliments he lavished upon her.

Medora was not ungenerous enough to enjoy this flattery, though she, perhaps, did not receive it quite as she might, had the homage not come from a man whom she once loved, and been paid in the presence of a successful rival. As soon, however, as the earliest limits of a morning call were reached, she rose to take leave. Lascelles accompanied her down stairs. She was not quite at her ease in this unexpected *tête-à-tête*, and in order to break the awkward pause which followed the adieu, took refuge in the first common-place that suggested itself.

"Of course you enjoyed Europe vastly."

"Yes," replied Lascelles, "there was only one thing I did not find there."

"What was that?" asked Medora, incautiously.

"*Forgetfulness!*"

The servant stepped forward to open the door before Medora could reply, but it needed a long walk through the cold air to smother again the slumbering fire that word had rekindled.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Elle m'insulte encor, elle ose, la cruelle!
Non! ma rage servit du triomphe pour elle."
Jane Gray.—MAD. DE STAEL.

"Remind me not, remind me not!
Of those beloved, those vanished hours,
When all my soul was given to thee,
Hours that may never be forgot."
BYRON.

As Mrs. Lascelles had sailed for Europe so immediately after her marriage, as to give her friends no opportunity for entertaining her as a bride, her return, taking place, as it did, during the holidays, was the signal for a series of balls and parties which were among the most brilliant of the season.

Lucy would have preferred to make her situation an excuse for declining many of these invitations, but her husband insisted upon accepting them all, as he was certain of meeting Medora at most of those gay scenes, and had neither the wish nor the power to deny himself the dangerous pleasure of her society. Of course, accustomed as she was to implicit obedience to all his demands, his wife never refused to accompany him, although she was certain that after entering the ball-room she should not see him again, except as hanging

about Medora with an admiration he did not attempt to disguise.

It soon became impossible for Mrs. Lascelles to close her eyes to the intimacy between them. Deceive herself as she might, there were too many significant circumstances which her quick perceptions detected to allow her to suppose that her husband's attentions were accidental; although Medora endeavored to give them that appearance, taking a mischievous delight in obliging him now to observe all the rules of conduct he had once laid down, to prevent suspicion of their former engagement. She was less cautious, however, where his wife was concerned; remembering the sufferings she had once caused her, Medora cruelly determined that she should drain the same cup of bitterness, forgetting that Lucy had never wilfully wronged her, while she was deliberately outraging all the dearest feelings of an affectionate and innocent heart.

As for Mr. Hamilton, he watched Medora's conduct closely, but as yet had discovered nothing which could give a clue to it, the terrible thought that Miss Fielding would indulge in a flirtation with a married man never once crossing his brain.

Thus several weeks passed away, Lascelles still devoting himself, so far as she would permit him, to Medora, and daily becoming more desirous of obtaining from her some indication that her former preference had not entirely ceased. On several occasions he tried to obtain a *tête-à-tête*, but she always adroitly baffled him. Once he actually went so far as to venture to her parlor unannounced, but to his vexation he found Mrs. Clarkson with her, and the two ladies made him feel himself so

evidently *de trop* that he was forced to beat a speedy retreat.

Late in January they met one evening at a small party, Lascelles engaged Medora's hand for an after-supper quadrille. When the turn for their dance came, under pretence of not being able to find either a place or a *vis-à-vis*, he succeeded in inducing her to leave the ball-room for the library. There, however, they found the usual number of wall-flower young ladies and diffident young men engaged in looking at prints, while a solemn silence reigned in the dreary apartment, broken only by an occasional, timid, half-whispered remark. The scene was too insufferably inane for Medora's endurance, and foreseeing that if she lingered she should inevitably be horribly bored, she readily agreed to Lascelles' proposition that they should enter a lovely conservatory, opening out from one of the windows. Here, to the chagrin of her companion, they found several sentimental couples also enjoying the subdued half-light and the graceful flowers.

Determining not to be disappointed, and fancying, with blind vanity, that there was a more tender tone than usual in Medora's talk, on reaching the end of the building, and finding that there was no one in sight, Lascelles pushed open a door leading into the yard, intending, notwithstanding that it was a very cold night, to persuade her to venture out. But at the first icy breath that swept into the warm and perfumed conservatory she dropped her hold upon his arm—

"Pray, Mr. Lascelles, close that door; why, the air is fearfully chilly."

"No, no," urged Lascelles, softly, "come outside just for a moment, it is splendid moonlight."

"Thank you, I prefer to return to the ball-room," replied Medora, with dignity, and turning she rapidly retraced her steps. Lascelles followed her with a suppressed oath, joining her, and offering his arm in sullen silence.

In the hall they met Lucy, who had noticed that her husband was not dancing, and vaguely hoping that he might be willing to go home, ventured to one of the doors to endeavor to attract his attention. When she saw him come out of the library with Medora on his arm her countenance fell, but as they approached she forced a faint smile. Her husband, after regarding her with a sidelong glance, would have passed her without a word, but Medora courteously paused.

"Have you been dancing?" she asked.

"No," replied Lucy, "I am too tired;" as she spoke she timidly touched her husband's arm, but surprised, exclaimed, "Why, Walter, how cold your hands are, where have you been?"

"Only in the library," he answered roughly, shaking off the light pressure.

"You have forgotten, Mr. Lascelles," said Medora, haughtily indignant at the falsehood, "we were in the conservatory when the door was open, and it was very cold."

Lucy colored at the insinuated reproof, and said apologetically, as her husband endeavored to pass her—

"I came to see if you were ready to go, Walter."

"No, I am not," he replied, impatiently. "Come, Miss Fielding, shall we continue our promenade?"

"Thank you," said Medora, dropping his arm; "but do not allow me to detain you, I was about to leave myself. Good-night, Lucy."

As she spoke she turned off to join Mrs. Clarkson, who was passing, and did not see the utterly wretched expression on poor Lucy's face, neither could she suspect the cruel, unkind words of her husband on their homeward drive, or all the demons of revenge in her heart would have been amply satiated.

After that evening Lucy positively refused to go out again; neither commands nor even the threats to which Lascelles was vile enough to descend, had the slightest effect upon her. She never complained, never even mentioned the name of the woman whom she believed to have stolen his affections, only with mild firmness insisted upon remaining at home. Finding at last that it was useless to endeavor to shake her resolution, her husband gave up the attempt, contenting himself with the utter neglect of either her convenience or her pleasure, and going out whenever he chose without informing her of his intended absence.

Medora had succeeded in rendering her rival's existence very unhappy; but in accomplishing this result she herself suffered keenly. The conduct of Lascelles towards her had so far opened her eyes to his true character that she now saw it in all its contemptible deformity. But although she knew him to be false, selfish, and cruel, she yet lacked the right principle which would have enabled her utterly to despise him; and while fully aware of his unworthiness, his society still possessed somewhat of its former fascination. Fortunately she had too much pride and dignity to permit him to sus-

pect this; and she often sincerely wished that something might occur to separate her from his influence. Meantime, Lascelles' devoted attentions caused her to regard the idea of marrying Mr. Hamilton with constantly increasing repugnance, the contrast was so striking between the unconcealed admiration of the former and the cold civilities of the latter. Thus this culpable coquetry rendered her restless, dissatisfied, and unhappy.

Alas! that a nature originally noble should have been, by a false education and the force of circumstances, so perverted. Had Medora been reared under the tender culture of a judicious and faithful mother, who would have carefully developed all the best qualities of her really fine character, and given her, above all, that steadfast faith and deep Religious reverence which must be the foundation of all true excellence, to what great good might have been turned the brilliant intellect and deep passion now all-powerful for evil and for suffering!

Even as it was, she had too much innate modesty and dignity to permit the possibility of her intimacy with Lascelles going beyond the shadowy bounds of a flirtation—improper, indeed, but not absolutely criminal.

Another fortnight elapsed, and the season was at its height, although there were several weeks of gaiety yet remaining, as Lent fell unusually late that year. Mr. Hamilton still continued unwearied in his attentions to Medora, watching constantly, with lynx eyes, her conduct towards her old lover. Never suspecting this surveillance had any deeper object than usual, she observed the same line of conduct as before, permitting Lascelles

no private interviews, but always allowing him to monopolize some portion of her time in public.

One morning Mr. Hamilton waited on her to a *matinée musicale* at the house of a mutual friend. As he had not the smallest taste for music, and was hopelessly unconscious of the difference even between a polka and an oratorio, at the commencement of an exquisite symphony he stole from the drawing-room where the company were assembled, and lounged into the library. Amid the rich stores of books around him, he could find nothing more interesting than the morning paper; with this he retired into the embrasure of a bay-window, and was soon deep in the news from Europe and the state of the stock market.

He had not quitted Medora's side many minutes when Lascelles arrived. He was late, because he had left home in the face of the most urgent entreaties of his wife, who, alarmed by the increasing feebleness of her father, had broken through her usual rules so far as directly to tell him that she thought it unseemly that he should be at any scene of gaiety when Mr. Wentworth was in so precarious a state as he had been for the past fortnight.

On arriving at the house all this was forgotten, and as the music had commenced, he did not attempt to find the hostess, but seeing Medora just inside the door of the drawing-room, seated himself beside her, and began an animated conversation. In vain she endeavored to check his volubility by signs; he continually uttered some half whispered remark which necessarily distracted attention from the performances. At last, seeing that he would not be quiet, she rose and walked rapidly,

with raised finger, across the hall to the door of the library.

"Mr. Lascelles, I merely came here to remind you of what you seem to have forgotten, that it is exceedingly rude to interrupt music by talking."

At the sound of her voice Mr. Hamilton looked up from his paper, but the remark was so trivial that he did not think it necessary to make his presence known, although they evidently had not observed him. Lascelles made a laughing apology, and Medora continued:

"If you please, we will return to the drawing-room."

"No, no!" said Lascelles, speaking in quick agitated accents, "now that, at last, I have you alone, you must answer one question, that for two months I have tried in vain to ask you: may I hope that the past is not wholly forgotten, and that you still love me?"

Medora drew herself up haughtily, there was an indignant answer on her lips, but the words died away unuttered, and a frightful paleness overspread her face, as she beheld Mr. Hamilton advancing across the room. He too was very pale, though he spoke in tones of frigid stateliness:

"You were mistaken in supposing yourselves alone, and the answer to your question, Mr. Lascelles, should not be given in the presence of a third person; Miss Fielding, I must beg you to excuse me from my attendance upon you this morning. I have no doubt, Mr. Lascelles will be happy to take my place."

He passed on with a cold bow, neither Medora nor her companion making any attempt to detain him.

Lascelles was the first to recover. There was an evil light of triumph in his eye, as he crept to Medora's side

and endeavored to take her hand. This act aroused her from the stupefaction into which she had been thrown by the appearance of Mr. Hamilton, and the knowledge of what would be the inevitable consequences of his overhearing those mad words. She started from the contamination of the touch, and said in a low, determined tone:

"Walter Lascelles, you know me well enough to understand that this insult will not pass unresented—now let me go!"

She returned to the music-room, and saw with apparently unmoved serenity that Mr. Hamilton had seated himself beside Miss Murray, and that he devoted himself to her for the rest of the morning so pointedly as to excite general remark. She felt that all possibility of replacing herself in his estimation was hopelessly lost, and thought with a deep sense of mortification and indignation of the untoward events of the morning. After what had passed it would be impossible for her to meet Lascelles again, except with the most distant acquaintance, and she was thus released from his dangerous intimacy, as well as Mr. Hamilton's odious attentions. She would have felt an absolute sense of relief had this freedom resulted from her own act. As it was, however, there was only gall and bitterness in the thought of what the world might whisper.

Lascelles did not appear again, for, while he was lingering in the hall, a messenger came to summon him home in hot haste. Without speaking to any one, he sprang into his carriage and drove rapidly away; but had his horses been swift as those fiery steeds that drew Phaëton to his destruction, they could not have undone the mischief his absence had caused.

CHAPTER XV.

"Juste ciel! un homme mort! Hélas! il ne souffre plus. Son âme est paisâble. Tendre et malheureux père!"

Lucrèce.—ROUSSEAU.

"Of all the strokes of God's hand, that which carries the greatest awe with it, is death."

Sermon on Death of Queen Caroline.—ARCHBISHOP SECCOR.

WHEN Lascelles left her that morning to go to the *matinée*, Lucy felt more than usually sad and forsaken. She could scarcely restrain her tears in his presence, and when she was alone she hid her face in her hands and wept bitterly.

It was indeed hard to be so entirely neglected by that husband who only ten short months ago had sworn to love and to cherish her. In this cruel trial one only consolation kept her from utter despair, and this was her implicit and unfailing trust in the kindness and mercy of the benevolent All-Father. Happily for her, Lucy had known, during all those early years when the character is forming, the tender care of a judicious mother. This excellent lady had reared her daughter to regard the Divine Being as a loving as well as a just God, and in all the sorrows of her short life beginning with the first great grief of losing that devoted parent, down to the present miserable anguish of knowing her-

self an unloved wife, Lucy had found unfailing relief from even her utmost wretchedness in resting in simple faith upon the kind Providence that watches with lenient forbearance over this erring world.

For some time her tears flowed unrestrainedly; then not without an effort she checked her sobs, and taking up some tiny article of dress that she was embroidering with loving care, went to seek her father whom she almost feared to leave one instant alone, so great had been the anxiety which his bowed form and sunken eyes had recently caused her. She found him in the library, buried in the cushions of a large arm-chair which he had drawn quite close to the fire; a sickly gleam of the pale winter sunlight played unnoticed on his silvery locks and closed lids, rendering the pallor of his cheeks even more ghastly with its yellow glare. Evidently he had fallen asleep, and Lucy, after listening for a few moments to his labored and heavy breathing, becoming convinced that such feverish slumber was of no benefit, approached the old man and gently roused him.

Mr. Wentworth opened his dull eyes, and regarded his daughter vacantly for an instant; then his thoughts wandered away from the present back over the dead past to the happy years of his early married life, when the smiles of his young wife were his sweet reward in the few hours he could steal from his close attention to business. His lips trembled, and he said tenderly—

"Have I slept too long, Mary?"

Although much alarmed, his daughter answered soothingly—

"It is not mamma, it is Lucy, dear papa; don't you know me?"

The old man raised himself half upright, and looked at her with an earnest gaze, then his face darkened, and he said in tones of inexpressible sadness—

"Yes, yes! I had forgotten all the weary years since your mother died; I see now it is my poor, poor Lucy; you are ill, you have been weeping, and very soon I too shall be gone!"

"Dont't say so, please, father," faltered Lucy.

"My dear child," continued Mr. Wentworth, with a look of clearer intelligence than his daughter had met since her return, "I am an old man, I cannot linger long, but it is very hard for me to leave you *now* when you need me so much. You have struggled bravely to conceal from me your unhappiness, but my eyes are not so dimmed with age and suffering that I have not seen it."

"You are so kind, papa, that you think me sad when I am only not well," interrupted Lucy, hurriedly.

"No, my darling! it is not that—there would not be one cloud upon your brow, if the man whom you have married were what he should be—but no, he is a false and cruel husband." As he uttered these words he started upright, and, not heeding Lucy's entreaties, went on wildly: "Yes, false and cruel! Oh! it cuts me to the very heart, and has rendered my last days wretched, to see the gentle daughter whom I have cherished so fondly a slave to the caprices of one so worthless. God only knows what will become of her, when I am gone. I cannot bear to see her suffer so; no, it kills me, it kills me!"

The last words were uttered in an inarticulate murmur that stopped short in a hissing rattle as he fell back

heavily in his chair. His arms hung rigid by his side,—a livid pallor overspread his face, the features fearfully distorted into a horrible burlesque of humanity that told that paralysis, in all its hideous deformity, had done its fatal work.

Lucy, who had watched him, absolutely petrified with horror, had just strength to rush to the bell and summon the household with a frantic peal before she fell fainting.

When the message reached Lascelles that called him from a scene of pleasure to his distracted home, coming, as it did, just after the avowal of a guilty passion, he was struck with terror at what seemed to him the consequences of his disregard of his wife's entreaties, and when he entered the house, he was so utterly unmanned by the shock as to be entirely incapable of directing what should be done in this emergency.

The servants had brought a physician, who, finding it too late to be of assistance to the father, had given all his attention to the daughter, and had succeeded in partially recovering her from the swoon. On the arrival of Lascelles, he was conducted at once to his wife's chamber. On entering the darkened room and hastening with trembling steps to the couch where she lay with closed eyes, so white and still, at first he thought he had killed her also, and flung himself down beside her with a wild cry of horror. At that sound Lucy half raised her drooping lids, looked fearfully at her husband, and then, with a despairing sigh, sank back upon her pillow.

"Oh! Lucy," exclaimed Lascelles, "only look at me once more, and say that you forgive me!"

These words aroused the physician, who had retired

to an adjoining apartment, and he hurried forward, saying in a half whisper—

"Mr. Lascelles, you must not talk to your wife. The most entire quiet is absolutely necessary, and any agitation will be exceedingly injurious and perhaps fatal!" Then seeing that the young man made no effort at calmness, he added firmly: "I must insist, sir, that you leave the room until you are somewhat more composed."

Left alone, and scarcely knowing what he did, Lascelles wandered down stairs and into the library. The gathering twilight filled it with silent gloom, and he had crossed it nearly to the fire before he discovered the lifeless form that still remained neglected where it had fallen. He paused frozen with fear, and gazed for a moment spell-bound at the ghastly spectacle. The red glow of the flames fell full upon the drooping head and bent figure, crimsoning the snowy hair and distorted face, and playing in weird gleams on the hands contracted with the pang of mortal agony.

At last he tore himself from the fearful fascination, and rushed from the room. Then feeling utterly helpless, and wholly unequal to the exigencies of the occasion, what little self-control he had retained vanished, and he gave way to a flood of useless and unavailing tears, that sprang not from any tender remorse at his past conduct, but from a cowardly dread of the present and the future.

It were hard to say which was the most piteous sight, —the cowed and dastardly man,—the poor stricken young girl,—or the loathsome corpse!

CHAPTER XVI.

"Love's a chameleon, and would live on air."
Aglaura.—SIR JOHN SUCKLING.

"When mid' the gay, I meet
That gentle smile of thine;
Though still on me it turns most sweet,
I cannot call it mine."
MOORE'S MELODIES.

THE long months of winter had dragged wearily to Floyd in the retirement of Southwold, where there was nothing to distract his thoughts from his secret sorrow. In vain had he sought to banish the recollection of his hopeless passion; still the remembrance of that bewitching loveliness haunted him as persistently as the shade of the lost Ludra pursued her innocent lover, until they were united for ever in the same eternal despair.

When the snows of January had clothed the hills in white robes, and the rolling waters of the Hudson were enchained in fetters of frost, the short days and long quiet evenings made Mr. Southwold long for more society than the country at that season afforded, and he suggested to his nephew that they should go to town for a few weeks. This proposition was received by Floyd with an irrepressible bound of delight. Even while smiling at his own folly he could not help rejoic-

ing in the prospect of again meeting Medora, and began his preparations for departure with an alacrity he had not displayed in any occupation, since that day when he rode so sadly away from Lazy-Bank.

It was a clear, bright morning, late in February, when they took the cars for New York. The sky pale blue, with tufts of fleecy clouds floating in its transparent depths—the air wonderfully pure and glittering. Floyd enjoyed the ride keenly, looking out on the dazzling sheets of ice, where gay parties of skaters were disporting themselves, sometimes a group of rosy-cheeked ladies skimming gracefully down the frozen stream, then a knot of boys sprawling awkwardly in their first attempts on iron shoes. The hills were thickly covered on their tops with snow, while on their rugged sides great brown patches appeared through the surrounding whiteness, like huge plum-cakes badly iced, suggestive of the departed glories of Christmas and New Year's.

On their arrival in town, they took up their quarters in the very comfortable hotel that Mr. Southwold had for years patronized as his city home, and from the number of cards speedily left for them, it was evident that they were likely to have their share of invitations to the various parties which were more numerous as the winter approached Lent.

The sudden death of Mr. Wentworth, although it took place in the middle of the gay season, and was followed by the dangerous illness of his daughter, cast but a passing gloom on the circle of their friends and acquaintances, although he had stood high in the community as a man of sterling worth. The funeral, which was attended by many of those most prominent in wealth and position,

had scarcely passed, with its sad freight and solemn train, than it was forgotten, and the business and amusements of the great world went on as before.

Oh! infatuated folly of humanity! although, in this awful mystery of life, there is nothing certain but death, the warnings that every day toll around us, are so utterly disregarded, that while we are constantly walking over graves and the whole world is one vast charnel-house, we still dance merrily and laugh carelessly, giving but a passing attention to that shadowy future whose momentous interests should absorb every thought of this brief existence. Not only is all contemplation of the blessing or curse of death postponed till the shadow of Azrael's wing is darkening over the doomed head, but even the great boon of life itself is never appreciated in its full and overwhelming importance. How many a man is born, and exists his allotted time, without ever having really *lived.* Until he arrives at maturity he is incapable of appreciating happiness in its highest degree, and by an imperative law of nature he is forced to spend at least one fourth of the passing hours in sleep; yet the few fleeting moments when he enjoys the full possession of his faculties, and which should be so precious as to be as carefully spent as a miser's hoarded gains, are wasted in the most absolute trifling, and he sinks at last to oblivion, never having even reached to that knowledge which Terence advises the suicide to acquire ;

> "Prius quæso disce quid fit vivere
> Ubi scies si desplicebat vita tum istoc utitor."

Mr. Wentworth left no will, and of course Lascelles became possessed, in right of his wife, of the whole of his

large fortune, yet it seemed at first that his tenure was likely to be but a brief one. For days Lucy's life hung by a thread, and his anxious solicitude was so great that it banished every other thought save the all-absorbing passion for Medora. Yet it sprang far less from a loving fear of losing that gentle and devoted wife, than from a dread lest the wealth for which he had bartered even honor and loyalty, should yet escape him. The joy with which he received the announcement of the birth of a daughter, and that both mother and child were in no immediate danger, sprang far more from the added security that the infant's life brought with it, than from the pure delight with which a father hails his first-born.

From this time he resumed in a measure his ordinary habits, although common propriety obliged him to remain secluded for a period. He soon came to regard his wife's illness as a matter of course, and scarcely troubled himself concerning her welfare, sometimes forgetting for a whole day to pay so much as a hurried visit to her sick room.

Poor Lucy, who had so long fondly hoped that when there was between herself and her husband the sweet tie of another life, he would surely love her a little, felt his neglect so deeply that it greatly retarded her recovery. The hours dragged wearily in her darkened chamber; ill and suffering, she thought sadly of her future, and except for the sake of her innocent child, she would willingly have closed her eyes in the peaceful rest of an everlasting sleep.

Perhaps it would have been some consolation to Lascelles, in his enforced absence, could he have known how much, notwithstanding her resolves, Medora missed his attentions, and how insipid all gaiety now seemed. Still,

she trod the same weary round of pleasure that was but a mockery of the name, and dissipations that were but fatigue. Not that the subtle incense of the homage her beauty commanded had ceased, but that this flattery, now that the charm of its first freshness had worn away, simply bored her, and having too much intellect to be satisfied with the mere frivolities of society, she was restless and miserable when her triumphs were without the excitement of an object.

The principal reason that impelled her to this treadmill life was that Mr. Hamilton had openly transferred his addresses to Miss Murray, meeting Medora only with cold civility, whom, it was more than whispered, he had jilted. Nothing could be imagined more galling to a proud spirit than such a story, and no wonder she did all in her power to contradict it—even stooping to an insinuation that she had refused him. Her knowledge of the world warned her that the only means of retrieving her tarnished *éclat* was by at once consummating some new engagement, and before the laurels of her former conquests were entirely withered, exchanging them for an orange wreath.

One morning, shortly after she had arrived at this conclusion, she went to see Mrs. Clarkson, to aid her in her preparations for her grand annual ball which was about to come off. She was greeted by her, with—

"Guess who is in town?"

"I am sure I cannot imagine."

"An old admirer of yours."

"Indeed," said Medora, with animation. "Who can it be?"

"Somebody whose name begins with F."

"You surely do not mean that tiresome Lieut. Fairchild?"

"Fairchild? Who was he?"

"Why, don't you remember that absurd navy officer that we met at Newport two seasons ago?

"Oh, yes, he came to town the same day we did, and sat on my dress all the way in the cars; horrid man! he absolutely ruined it. What wonderful adventures, according to his own account, he had met with."

"Ridiculous! I do not believe that any of them really occurred. Do you recollect that story of his about the nun whom he met in New Orleans, and who fell so in love with him? He said she had never met a man before, except one hideously old priest; that might, it is true, account for her infatuation in selecting such a person upon whom to bestow her affections, but was certainly scarcely credible."

"Why not?"

"Why, do you suppose she could have made that long journey without even beholding one of the ship's company, or any other chance specimen of the lords of creation?"

"Of course, I did not think of that. But he always talked with the air of himself believing what he said, and was indignant if any one looked doubting."

"Oh! I have no doubt there was some foundation for all his fabrications, only he exaggerated to excite wonder and admiration. That sort of vain-glorious boasting is something I have no patience with," added Medora, earnestly. "A downright lie that attains some object, or excuses some fault, I can forgive, but not such uninteresting absurdities which one is obliged to

look as if one was fool enough to believe, while in one's secret heart one heartily despises such a transparent shift of a petty mind to obtain a little passing notice."

"You are quite didactic, I declare," cried Mrs. Clarkson, laughing, "and meanwhile you are forgetting all about your poor adorer."

"So I am. Now do not be a tease, but tell me at once, who is it?"

"I certainly shall not dare to be a tease as you say, if my punishment is to be having such a sermon as that hurled at my inoffensive head. It is Floyd Southwold."

Medora started with delight. "*Méchant*, you said F."

"Well, does not Floyd begin with F.? or would you prefer to spell it with a Ph? He is with his uncle at the Burleigh, and you may address them this card, that is if your ideas are sufficiently clear on the subject of the orthography of his name."

So Medora sent the invitation, and Floyd joyfully accepted it, dressing himself with elaborate care for a ball at which he was almost certain of meeting again that fair girl whom he yet so deeply loved, and going a little early in the vague hope that she might be there before the rest of the guests. In this, however, he was disappointed, and being an almost entire stranger, he stationed himself near one of the doors to watch for her arrival. He had not stood there many minutes when he heard that name which was sacred in his eyes, lightly pronounced by a young man near him.

"Medora Fielding? Yes, she's certainly handsome. I wonder if Hamilton really jilted her as they say."

Floyd crimsoned with indignation at the words and tone, and turned suddenly upon his astonished neighbor.

"Excuse me, but I have the honor to be a friend of Miss Fielding's, and I must beg of you to speak of her with more respect, at least in my presence."

The person who had uttered the obnoxious words, seeing that Floyd really was annoyed and pained, hastened to explain.

"I beg pardon, most certainly, of course. I had no idea that you took an interest in the young lady. I merely repeated common report."

There was no possibility of taking further offence, and although Floyd would have liked to have had an excuse for severely resenting his impertinence, he was obliged to accept the apology. As he stood half-hesitating, he heard a voice pronounce his name that made him turn with a sudden start, and behold, she whose cause he had just maintained, stood beside him. Little could he guess how ill she deserved his championship, when he gazed on the glorious eyes, and the golden hair of which he had so often dreamed. His heart throbbed with yearning tenderness towards her, and he longed to clasp her in his arms, and fly with her far from all the cavillers of this censorious world.

She had seen him on her first entrance, and after watching for a moment with an earnest look, his graceful figure and animated features, she dexterously approached him. She now held out her hand with a frank smile, saying:

"I am so glad to see you again."

At these words, he would willingly have knelt to

thank her for the happiness of knowing that she cared to meet him once more, never thinking, in his simple honesty, that had she really rejoiced, with the trembling timidity of a loving woman, she would not have so openly expressed it.

In a few moments he was waltzing with her, and yielding himself wholly to the intoxication of the moment. Nor had his uncle's whispered "Beware!" the slightest effect to tear him from the side of that beautiful belle, who once more held him a willing captive in her rosy chains. He would not permit himself during that bright evening to have one thought of the future, revelling only in the enjoyment of the present. It was such delight to be with her again, to drink in her loveliness, and listen to the soft tones of her musical voice.

Before they parted he had made an engagement with her for the following morning, so that he could look forward to anticipated pleasure as well as think of past delights. He could scarcely sleep for the rapturous joy of his heart, and when at last he did close his eyes it was only to dream intoxicatingly of his fair ladye-love.

Medora, too, lay awake long hours thinking of the future—not with the excitement of passion, but with the calm calculation of the schooled woman of the world. That evening she had met a man who she knew loved her fondly, and for whose many noble qualities she had a sincere admiration. In every respect he was exactly what she wished, young, ardent, and above all, as she believed, pliant as wax in her hands. He lacked only fortune. But of this the world was ignorant, she alone knew his precise situation. At pre-

sent her affairs wore a dark aspect. Was it not far better to marry this young man, with whom she had every reasonable prospect of happiness, than to continue the wretched life she had led this past winter? One only obstacle stood between him and wealth—was that sufficient cause for despairing? Assuredly not. As she reached this conclusion she smiled to herself in the darkness, with an expression as impenetrable as the gloom around her.

Of course, after such a vigil, she rose late the next morning, and had but just completed her toilette when Floyd arrived. They lingered some time in the little parlor, but the presence of Mrs. Fielding effectually prevented a *tête-à-tête*, and at last, as the day was fine, Medora donned her soft furs and bewitching hat, and they went out for a walk.

They had not strolled far when Floyd, who, with loving eyes, watched every motion of his companion, saw her lip curl into a singular smile as she bent, almost imperceptibly, in acknowledgment of the ceremonious salutation of a tall and handsome man, who passed with Miss Murray leaning on his arm. Floyd scarcely needed to ask—

"Who was that?" He guessed the name before it came, with sudden sharpness—

"Mr. Hamilton."

But he was at fault when a few moments afterwards a black coach, with driver and footmen all in the deepest mourning, passed, and Medora colored deeply as she responded to the eager bow of the young man who was its sole occupant.

"I hope I am not troublesome," said Floyd with

jealous curiosity, "you know I am such a stranger! but may I ask who that was?"

"Mr. Lascelles," answered Medora, as carelessly as she could, "he has recently lost his father-in law."

"Ah!" said Floyd, suddenly relieved to find him a married man, "I should not have remembered him. He looks to me much changed since I saw him on his marriage."

"How so?"

"He has a haggard, dissipated look, but perhaps it is only the black dress."

"Probably," said Medora shortly, and the conversation dropped. Still Floyd could not help puzzling a little to account for his companion's change of color at the passing look of those sinister eyes.

It was so natural for him to fall into his old habits of intimacy with Medora, and they met so frequently during the carnival week, that Floyd was unable to resist the temptation, especially as after that first evening, his uncle never, either by word or look, expressed any disapproval of it. On the contrary, he was almost as frequently seen in the circle around Miss Fielding as Floyd himself, watching her with a close attention and untiring interest, until his nephew began to imagine that her wonderful fascinations could not be wholly without their effect, and must awaken in his uncle's breast the kindly and fatherly affection he would have wished to have him feel towards his bride.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Linked in the inwoven charm
Of converse and caresses sweet and deep."
KORMAK'S SAGA.

"She that has no one to love or trust, has little to hope."
Rasselas.—DR. JOHNSON.

THE gay season of that brilliant winter at last died in a series of splendid balls, and Lent began its mournful reign. The bright skies and sparkling snows of midwinter were gone, and March scowled on the frozen earth. The streets were full of half-melted ice, bleak winds blew incessantly, and often, for days together, wretched storms of sleet and rain rendered it impossible to leave the snug fireside.

During these weeks of seclusion and quiet home-enjoyments, Floyd found himself constantly alone with Medora. Sometimes he lounged idly near her during the mornings, while with wonderful rapidity she wrought some delicate embroidery, or, having but little taste for the feminine graces of the needle, found a more congenial amusement in that favorite resource of all ladies for the entertainment of a lover, the idle fingering of the piano. Then, while she played with great taste and expression, or sang in a rich clear voice whose passionate tones thrilled the heart, he would watch with worship-

ping fondness the play of feeling on her perfect features. And again he indulged in the dangerous pleasure of sitting by her side through the dreamy twilight, while the pale sunshine faded away, and only the ruddy glow of the coals filled the room with its cheerful tone. Yet he never approached the forbidden theme of love. After the mild reproof with which she had rejected his former suit, he felt that it would be dishonorable for him to venture again to address her, although he made no attempt to conceal the absorbing devotion that prompted every action, the loving tenderness that filled his breast.

Medora's own refined nature appreciated fully this delicate reserve. Although she had taken pains to manifest on every occasion a preference for his society, she saw that there was no possibility of his again offering her his hand without more decided encouragement than he had as yet received, and she watched eagerly for an opportunity when she might secure a *tête-à-tête* free from all possibility of interruption.

The occasion presented itself when, one evening, her mother went to dine with her cousins, the Misses Clinton. These were two sisters, ladies, who to say the least had survived early youth. They resided on one of the quiet old parks, in a house whose principal furniture remained unchanged since their girlish days. Yet, as the years rolled on, they had become more sad and sombre in their tastes, until in the arrangement of their parlor they had carefully avoided everything that was out of the straight line of propriety, even banishing some fine old pictures of their father's, on the ground that the subjects were not of a strictly moral character,

and substituting in their places various scriptural scenes that made up in piety what they lacked as works of art. Indeed, so fond were they of a style of ornament suggestive of devotion that their clock was a kneeling Samuel, their hearth-rug depicted Meschac, Shadrac, and Abednego in the fiery furnace, while their chandelier represented Korah swinging the obnoxious censer.

When Mrs. Fielding received her invitation to this maiden home, and announced her intention of accepting it, Medora understood that she should have a long, quiet evening. A mere casual mention of this to Floyd, when he joined her in her morning walk, insured its not being spent alone. Her mother had not been gone long when a card was brought up. She scarcely needed to glance at it to tell the waiting servant—

"Show Mr. Southwold up, John, and be sure to remember that I am not at home to any one else."

A moment afterwards Floyd entered, looking radiant, as he always did when he met this woman, whose presence made his happiness. Medora rose to meet him with a charming cordiality, and as she re-seated herself on the sofa, arranged her dress with that air, which, in a lady, implies "sit beside me." Of course, Floyd accepted the tacit invitation, and thus placed himself so near her that the ample folds of her skirt touched him, and with every breath he inhaled the subtle perfume that was as much one of her distinguishing characteristics as the golden sheen of her hair or the sunny light of her eyes.

Under these bewildering circumstances it was entirely impossible for him to talk interestedly, or indeed coherently on any subject but one, and that was interdicted.

He gave, therefore, but disconnected answers to her few attempts at conversation until she said—

"You have never told me anything about your visit at Stratford. Of course, it was delightful."

"I was glad to see my mother, but," he added with a sigh, "when I first went there I was too unhappy to enjoy anything."

"Why, what made you unhappy?" asked Medora, innocently.

"How can you ask me?" replied Floyd, with an eager glance; "surely, you ought to recollect what a bitter disappointment I had just before I left Southwold."

"I remember it only too well," responded Medora, almost in a whisper; "do you think I have not suffered also?"

Floyd would have been more or less than man could he have resisted that appeal, the soft tone in which the words were pronounced, the downcast eyes, and the suppressed sigh at their close. Beside himself with joy at the acknowledgment, delirious with passion, he poured out all his pent-up love and longings, and when, at the close of an eloquent appeal, Medora faltered that promise he had despaired of ever obtaining, he clasped her unresistingly in his arms, and pressed his trembling lips to hers.

In those wild moments no answering fire burnt in Medora's cold breast. She felt, it is true, a certain sense of comfort in the thought that she had securely won his honest heart, but with it there was a dreary consciousness that she had now irrevocably united her fate with this man's, whose future was yet too doubtful

for her to look forward to it with any hope of the peaceful repose for which she longed so earnestly.

Fortunately for him Floyd felt and saw no want on her part, he only knew that such a flood of brightness had burst upon him as dazzled and blinded him with its effulgence. All the despair of the past months was gone, and he was intoxicatingly happy. Medora loved him, and no king on his throne can have a dearer prize than the answering affection of the woman he adores. She loved him, and he fancied that heaven could never again grant him so great a boon as this.

With the trembling eloquence of deep feeling, he poured out his passionate protestations, until a chilling recollection checked somewhat his joyous words, and he said, despondently:

"Medora, you are too kind. How can I be so selfish as to ask you to make the sacrifice you must in marrying me?"

"Rather," replied Medora, gently endeavoring to disengage herself from his embrace, "rather let me remember, what you almost made me forget, that I should not permit you to give up wealth for me."

Of course, Floyd only clasped her closer, as he exclaimed:

"You know that I had rather share a hovel with you, than live in a palace without you."

"See how selfish we both are," said Medora, with a bewitching smile. "We are each quite willing to endure poverty, provided the other shares it."

"It would be a light trial to me; but," he added, tenderly, "although I should not feel it for myself, I

could not bear to see you have one ungratified wish, my darling."

How that word thrilled her very heart with the hopeless memories it awakened. Yet, with an effort, she suppressed the emotion, and answered cheerfully:

"But, my friend, why should you speak so despondently? I do not believe there is really as great cause for it as you think, though I do not correctly understand your relations with your uncle. Come, tell me all about it."

So Floyd related everything that had passed between them—that promise given, when he was an infant, whose fulfilment at one time he regarded as certain—confidently expecting to be his uncle's acknowledged heir, under any circumstances, until that interview when Mr. Southwold had dashed his hopes to the ground, and rendered him so unhappy.

"How cruel!" exclaimed Medora, when Floyd had concluded his brief narration.

"Oh! not that," he rejoined, earnestly. "He had a right to his prejudices and their gratification."

"No," continued Medora, quickly; "he had not, in this case, and his conduct was not only cruel, but unjust."

"Unjust! how?"

"In this; that after having induced your parents to give you his name, by coupling the request that they would do so with a promise to adopt you as a son, no act of your mother's released him from the obligation, and he is bound to fulfil it under any circumstances."

"But," urged Floyd, "he does intend to make me his heir, ultimately. That is all I am entitled to expect."

"Is that acting a parent's part? No, indeed! You have every reason not only to expect, but to demand, that he should treat you in all respects as a son. If he does not wish you to live with him as a married man, he should give you a sufficient portion of your inheritance at once to establish you in life."

This suggestion shed a faint ray of light on Floyd's clouded prospects, and he seized it eagerly.

"Perhaps he may be induced to do something of the sort; he knows how much I am attached to you, and he has been much interested in you himself, lately. I am sure he admires you extremely; indeed, he could not help that."

Medora had accomplished what she wished; she had boldly put into words the dissatisfaction Floyd had not yet trusted himself to utter, and at the same time presented a possible hope for the future. She now permitted the conversation to return to love; that old theme which, since it was first breathed in the bowers of Eden by the only two human beings in the whole desolate earth, down to this day, when millions are whispering it, in the cottages and palaces of the thick-peopled world, has been the dearest that mortal lips can utter.

The hours of that happy evening glided by like so many seconds, until, at a hint from Medora that it was very late, Floyd rose to go. Then he suggested that propriety demanded that he should at once inform his Uncle of his new engagement, and request the honor of Mrs. Fielding's consent.

"Oh yes! of course, you must speak to mamma; you can come to-morrow morning for that, but I had rather

you would wait a day or two longer before mentioning it to Mr. Southwold."

"Certainly, if you wish it. You know henceforth I am your slave," he added gallantly.

It is impossible to say how long Floyd might have lingered over the sweet parting, but a few minutes afterwards Mrs. Fielding returned. She greeted him with great cordiality, for, regarding him as an eligible *parti*, she was always glad to see him with her daughter. This did not, however, prevent Floyd from feeling a delightful half guilty embarrassment, and he left as soon as politeness permitted.

"What a charming fellow he is!" exclaimed Mrs. Fielding, enthusiastically, almost before he was out of hearing.

"I am glad you like him," replied her daughter, as she flung herself wearily on the sofa, "for I intend to marry him."

"Marry him, Medora!" cried her mother, "are you engaged to him?"

"Of course, or I should not say so; he has this evening offered himself to me, and I have accepted him."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Fielding, sinking back into her chair; "well, I suppose it is a good match, as every one says he is to be his Uncle's heir, but you should not have told me so suddenly, I am really quite faint with the shock."

Thus did she receive this announcement that might involve her daughter's happiness for life, giving no tender sympathy, offering no kindly advice, only with a querulous complaint. It is not surprising that Medora gave but an impatient reply, and that she shortly after retired,

not that she was weary or drowsy, but that in her little bed, during the silence of night, was the only time she could quietly reflect.

There, in those still hours, she could take counsel with her own heart, the only *confidante* she ever trusted, having long since come to rely solely upon herself. A piteous lesson is this for any woman to learn, for with their affectionate natures that instinctively yearn for sympathy and guidance, it can never be accomplished without a fearful loss of all the tenderer and softer qualities.

Medora felt none of the trembling joy of the happy *fiancée*, in contemplating her engagement. She had only a galling sense of her loss of freedom, and a consciousness that her conduct henceforth must be most warily guarded. It was impossible for her as yet to form any satisfactory plans for the future, beyond urging upon her lover the suggestion she had hazarded that evening, although she had very slender hopes of its success.

Among other harassing thoughts, she was somewhat anxious as to the morning's interview between her mother and Floyd, lest he should openly avow his poverty, and she should become alarmed, or imprudently permit it to transpire. But this proved to be a groundless fear, for the honest young fellow was so full of his overflowing love and bright hopes, that Mrs. Fielding, who had frequently figured in similar interviews, and was quite accustomed to the hyperbole of lovers, attributed what he said about "working for her daughter day and night" to the natural romance of his feelings, which was quite explained when he talked of "winning fame."

Delighted with his deferential courtesy, she gave such a complimentary consent to his wooing, that he quitted her with a heart overflowing with gratitude and happiness.

Returning to his room, he was soon busily engaged in writing a long letter to his mother, informing her of his engagement, and dwelling, as lovers are wont, on each perfection of the beautiful woman he adored. Little did he guess, in his own joyousness, the effect which the perusal of those trembling lines would produce—the vague solicitude that sprang up in his tender mother's heart, or the uncomplaining misery of the gentle Nannie, who, in one sad moment, awoke to the double consciousness that she had loved, and that she had loved in vain!

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Ueber euch Weiber und das ewige Rathsel!"

SCHILLER.

"Remember that love is a passion, and that a worthy man's reason must ever have the masterhood."

The Arcadia.—SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

"May you be as happy with *him* as your amiable dispositions deserve, and think sometimes of the friends you have lost."

Waverley.—SIR WALTER SCOTT.

DURING the next week, which was the last of Lent, it stormed incessantly, and Medora saw her lover only in private. Again and again did she recur to the interesting topic of his uncle's past conduct towards him; and Floyd, who had at first been somewhat shocked at her animadversions upon it, soon came to regard them as quite deserved, or at least to acquiesce in all she said. Indeed, her strong force of character, coming in contact with his pliant amiability, gave her a great apparent ascendency over him. Presuming upon this, she ventured constantly to urge upon him the idea that he was entitled, under any circumstances, to some present assistance. Finally, one morning when he begged again that she would permit him to inform Mr. Southwold of his engagement, she coupled her consent with the bold

suggestion, that, when announcing it to his uncle, he should respectfully ask him to advance him a certain sum at once, adding—

"Of course we shall not be married until you are admitted to the bar, and after that I shall have no fears for the future."

"I hardly like to make such a request," said Floyd, hesitating.

"Why not? It is no more than you have a right to demand; and if Mr. Southwold had your unselfish nature, he would have proposed it himself long ago."

"But what if he refuses?"

"Then," replied Medora with ill-disguised impatience, "I suppose we must wait. However, I hardly think he can be so ungenerous. At least no harm can be done by making the proposition."

"I hope not; for it is certainly not unreasonable, and he must consider me justified in suggesting it."

This point gained, Medora cared very little for concealing her engagement. To this conclusion she was somewhat hastened by receiving cards for a party at Miss Sophronia Hamilton's, which was to come off soon after Lent, and was given to announce the betrothal of her brother and Miss Murray.

Horrible custom of civilized society, that when two hearts are plighted, the maiden, whose cheek should be suffused with blushes at the tenderest allusion to so sacred a pledge, is subjected to the public congratulations of her friends at a ball or rout! Surely, modesty and delicacy must alike shrink wounded from such an ordeal.

Floyd left Medora very much gratified that she had

at last given him permission to mention his engagement to his uncle, feeling that both duty and propriety required that he should be made aware of it. Although he shrank with instinctive delicacy from making the request she had urged upon him, he yet sought eagerly a favorable opportunity for conversing with Mr. Southwold. This did not occur till after dinner, when they were quietly seated with their wine and post-prandial cigars. Not without some hesitation and a short pause for reflection, Floyd began—

"Uncle Southwold, I believe that my conduct towards Miss Fielding last summer met with your approbation."

"Certainly," replied his uncle, a little surprised, "if you considered yourself in honor bound to the young lady, you were quite right in addressing her, notwithstanding my dislike to the idea of your marrying."

"I trust I may venture to hope that that prejudice is in a measure removed, for my object in alluding to the subject is to announce to you that I have the honor to be engaged to her."

"Really, Floyd, you astonish me," exclaimed Mr. Southwold, with an impatient start and a look of vexation; "I thought that folly was done with for ever!"

"Please God it will last my life, sir," replied Floyd, earnestly; "though I deeply regret that the idea is distasteful to you."

"And when do you propose espousing the young lady?"

"I fear not very soon. I should like to resume the study of my profession at once. Although I should feel deeply grateful if you would give me some present assistance, for which I would willingly resign the expec-

tations which you have so kindly led me to entertain, but which can never be realized except through an event too painful to bear contemplation."

"That is, you would barter your inheritance, I might almost say your birthright, for the sake of such a sum as would enable you to marry at once."

"Yes, sir, I would."

Mr. Southwold reflected for a few moments. In every point of view this information and request were distasteful to him. In the first place, he regarded it as entirely impossible for him to make his nephew even ever so small an advancement. For years he had been in the habit of spending his entire income, not caring to lay by for he knew not whom, and to set aside any portion of the principal would require some slight sacrifice which, of course, he considered as entirely out of the question. In the second place, he had his own selfish reasons for being very averse to his nephew's leaving him. Coming to this conclusion, he said decisively—

"Really, Floyd, it will be quite impossible for me to give you anything till I have done with it, but, meantime, you will not leave me at present." Then to relieve the awkward pause which followed his words, he added: "I must do myself the honor of paying a congratulatory visit to Miss Fielding—come, shall we go at once?"

Of course Floyd could not refuse to accompany his uncle, although he was grievously disappointed and hurt at the result of this conversation, and remembering what Medora had said, it seemed to him selfish and unkind.

During his visit of ceremony Mr. Southwold was all

dignified suavity and graceful compliment, and Medora might have been deceived into the supposition that he regarded his nephew's proposed alliance as in the highest degree gratifying, had not Floyd found an opportunity, while his uncle was conversing with Mrs. Fielding, to intimate that his suit had been unsuccessful. Glancing from her lover to those cold sharp-cut features, Medora knew that there was no hope of relenting in that thoroughly selfish character, and the hatred that sprang up in her remorseless brain might have made that old man tremble.

To Floyd's surprise, when they were alone, while complaining bitterly of their recent disappointment, she yet violently opposed his wish to recommence the study of the law. She only succeeded in inducing him to yield to this strange request by employing an argument that to so fond a lover was unanswerable. She reminded him that she should be at Lazy-Bank for a good portion of the summer, and that during that period he must on no account be absent from Southwold. She also entreated him not to mention to any one their uncertain prospects, absolutely making this a condition of her favor, and supporting it with so many excellent reasons that, considering this a trifling matter, Floyd acquiesced.

The following morning Medora went to see Mrs. Le Roy Clarkson at an hour when she was sure of finding her at home, in order to announce her engagement. Seated cosily with her friend, Medora began:

"Well, Sue, I have some news to tell you."

"Really, some news! How exciting, what is it?"

"I am engaged to be married."

"At last the fascinater is fascinated. Who is the happy man?"

"Floyd Southwold, Jr., of Southwold, at your service."

"Oh, I am so glad! His devotion deserves its reward. My dear Medora, I congratulate you most sincerely," cried Mrs. Clarkson, and rising she gently kissed her friend.

Her act and tone showed so much real kindness and true sympathy, that Medora's heart, which a moment before had been ice, melted, and tears started to her eyes. Thinking of how happy Mrs. Clarkson imagined her, and of how really wretched and perplexed she was, the contrast smote her with sudden anguish, and she longed to pillow her aching head on that one tender breast and sob out all her sorrows. With a violent effort she choked back her emotion, and strove to reply gaily, although in a voice which yet vibrated with the tremulousness of unshed tears.

"I am sure you will be very happy," added Mrs. Clarkson, heartily, "you will live at that lovely place, and with Mr. Southwold who is such a charming old gentleman."

These last words aroused a new train of thought in Medora's mind. She was once more entirely mistress of herself, replying carelessly—

"Ah, yes, delightful."

"I congratulate you also on not having to undergo the disagreeability of an announcement party."

"Yes, I am glad to escape that trial, it must be an immense bore."

"By the way, you were not at the Hamiltons'."

"No, I left off going there long ago, their rooms are always so cold, and Miss Sophronia herself is so frigid that their entertainments are invariably slow."

"But I believe she really is a very excellent woman."

"Oh, yes, I dare say she will go to heaven. However, that is but a melancholy reflection after all. Poor thing, she will not even have the consolation of being warm in the other world."

"Medora! you are too bad; I am shocked, but you would have been amused, had you been there, to see Henrietta Murray flirting with that young Spaniard who was so attentive to her a while ago."

"Indeed, I should think she would scarcely have dared to do that with a man like Mr. Hamilton. How did he take it?"

"Rather savagely; you know Henrietta Murray, though. I do not envy him his lot with her."

So the two friends chatted idly until the arrival of Floyd interrupted their *tête-à-tête*. Mrs. Clarkson congratulated him warmly, and sincerely rejoiced to see in his beaming face the devotion of his heart.

Supremely proud and happy was Floyd as he returned with Medora leaning on his arm, openly acknowledging their betrothal, and she quite enjoyed Mr. Hamilton's surprised look as they chanced to meet.

After this, for several days, Medora held quite a *levée* in her little parlor, her friends hastening, as soon as her engagement became generally known, to pay the visit of compliment required by etiquette.

CHAPTER XIX.

"La jalousie est la plus grand de tous les maux, et celui qui fait le moins de pitié aux personnes qui le caussent."

LES MAXIMES DE LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

"Skoal! to the Northmen! Skoal!"

Skeleton in Armor.—LONGFELLOW.

DURING the period of Medora's temporary triumph her rival, poor Lucy Lascelles, still lay ill and suffering. The soft air and bright sun of May brought no renewed health to her feeble frame. She had never recovered from the prostrating illness which followed the birth of her little daughter, and it had long ago been found necessary to establish some one permanently at the head of her household. Whenever an instance like this occurs be sure some tender ministering angel will spring up. In this case it was a widowed cousin, who hastened with eager alacrity to shut herself up in this house of illness, and devote herself with untiring patience to the cheering and amusing of the poor invalid. Mrs. Hartly had herself, during the brief period of her married life, known the devotion of an affectionate husband, and she speedily discovered, that, although Lucy never complained, the worst cause of the illness, which sometimes seemed to threaten her life, was the neglect of Lascelles. Since the birth of her infant, through the weary weeks

of three long months, she had failed to gain sufficient strength to leave her room. Sometimes, for days together, she was unable even to quit her bed for more than a few moments, when propped on pillows she would look longingly at the outside world, in which already she was almost forgotten. Her poor babe had thriven but ill, and her anxiety about its welfare, together with her husband's unkindness and neglect, so wore upon her, that it was not surprising that the physician in attendance almost despaired of her recovery.

When a friend one day, dropping in to cheer her with a few moments' chat and the news of the town, informed her of Medora's engagement, a sudden gleam of light brightened her poor stricken heart with the hope that this false enchantress, whom she believed to have stolen her husband's affections, would no more darken her path with her fatal spells. At the time she received this information Lascelles was absent on some business connected with the estate of his late father-in-law, and on his return, when he came in for a few queries about her health, Lucy could not forbear asking him—

"Have you heard of the new engagement, Walter?"

"New to you, I suppose you mean, Mr. Hamilton and Miss Murray. I knew of that long ago."

"Oh, yes!" replied Lucy; "Miss Sophronia sent us cards for the announcement party. I do not allude to that, but to one that has come out since you left."

"Well, whose is it?"

"Medora Fielding is engaged to young Floyd Southwold, from up the river."

"Not really!" exclaimed Lascelles, starting up with an oath.

"Every one says so. It has been formally announced, and Medora has received congratulatory calls."

He was completely overcome by this intelligence, never having even heard of Floyd's attentions, as they had been principally paid since all gaiety had ceased, and while he was entirely out of society. Having succeeded in breaking off her affair with Mr. Hamilton, he had fancied that for the present there was little danger of her securing another lover, so that he was totally unprepared for the shock of finding a new obstacle between them. Acting, as was his wont, upon the impulse of the moment, without pausing an instant for reflection, he hurriedly quitted the room and the house, directing his steps, with the intention of seeing Medora at all hazards, to the boarding-house where she lived—as incongruously housed as if a gorgeous bird of Paradise was imprisoned in the cage of a cottage-door linnet.

It was too early for formal visiting hours. Remembering this, and that he might perhaps be refused admittance, he would not send up his name, but ran up-stairs and knocked at the door of her parlor himself.

"Who's there?"

These words, pronounced in those clear ringing tones he knew so well, informed him that Medora was within, and without answering, he abruptly entered. She was alone—seated at the piano in a graceful morning dress, her fingers straying idly over the keys, her thoughts full of the soft memories which would sometimes steal over her. Yet, when that man of whom she had just been dreaming appeared so unceremoniously before her, it recalled all her dignity, and she arose with a frigid bow.

"To what am I indebted for the honor of this unexpected visit?"

"Medora!" exclaimed Lascelles impetuously, "is it true that you are engaged to Floyd Southwold?"

"Really, sir, that is a question which I might deny you the right to ask; but since there is no reason why I should wish to conceal the fact, I will answer you that I am."

"And do you love him?"

"Mr. Lascelles, you forget yourself!"

"Oh, Medora! do not speak to me so coldly, I implore you. How can I remember anything but that I love you, and that it makes me wretched to think of you as another's."

Perhaps at that moment Medora felt that Lascelles was enduring what she once had, when she first knew that he was faithless, and this thought, even then, was one of triumphant pleasure.

Her voice trembled a little, as with an effort she replied:

"Mr. Lascelles, I must beg you to leave me. You have already injured me hopelessly in the estimation of one man by your imprudent avowals. I am expecting Mr. Southwold every moment—I entreat you to go."

Even as she uttered these words there came a bounding step upon the stairs, whose every accent spoke the happy lover seeking his mistress. Lascelles heard it, and said as he turned away—

"I see that it is useless for me to linger now, but oh! Medora, think of me sometimes, and be sure that no marriage shall ever wholly separate us."

As he spoke he opened the door and passed by Floyd,

who was waiting outside, with a steady stare. At that moment he saw that Medora's lover was young and handsome, and he supposed him rich. Could she have seen the frantic jealousy which filled his heart at that moment she would have known that her own sufferings were in a measure avenged.

"Was not that Mr. Lascelles?" asked Floyd, with the same vague feeling of uneasiness that had crossed his mind when he encountered him on their walk.

"Yes!" answered Medora, carelessly, "he wishes me to go and see his wife, poor girl; she has been confined to her room for three months past. I really ought to call there."

This reply completely reassured Floyd, and he sat down beside her as trustingly fond as ever; yet their talk that morning was a little saddened on his part by the thought of his approaching departure. It was arranged that he was to leave for Stratford the day upon which his uncle started for Southwold, warned by the advancing spring that his presence would be necessary in directing some projected improvements.

"So he is going to build a palm-house and new grapery," said Medora.

"Yes, he thinks they will be a great addition to the place."

"Very likely; yet he will spend more on this freak of fancy than we should require for a year's support."

"Oh! Dearest Medora, I wish you would not say such things, it makes me so unhappy, and it is not like your really noble heart."

A little startled by this reproof, gentle as it was, Medora hastened to make such a reply as would rein-

state her in her lover's opinion. Without as yet any definite plans for the future, she was extremely desirous to excite in Floyd's mind feelings of discontent towards his uncle, instinctively perceiving that his influence was hostile to her own. Her exquisite tact, however, warned her that this result would be more easily accomplished by a few judicious hints than by open denunciations.

Yet she would have been more than justified in the severest animadversions upon Mr. Southwold's conduct. Indeed, Floyd himself had been deeply pained by the manner in which his uncle treated his engagement, speaking of it as if it had been merely contracted for the amusement of an hour, and if asked how soon they were to be married, replying—

"Oh! we do not talk of that yet awhile. We must give their constancy a trial first."

In fact the wily old gentleman was fully determined to break up the proposed alliance. At first he indulged a hope that Floyd might tire of it. Finding, however, that his attachment strengthened with every interview, he resolved systematically to endeavor to draw out the unamiable or dangerous qualities, which his quick eye detected lurking under Medora's rare fascinations of manner, and to force them upon Floyd's attention.

With this intention he frequently joined his nephew in his evening visits to his *fiancée*, seeking to induce her to avow some unfeminine or heterodox sentiment. So far, however, in these encounters of wit, Medora had invariably retained her lady-like self-possession. With ready penetration she detected Mr. Southwold's motive, and while it deepened her dislike towards him into

active hatred, she yet warily guarded every step so as completely to baffle his ingenuity.

Under these circumstances, she did not meet him with much real pleasure when he joined his nephew in his farewell call on the evening before they left. As usual, he took a seat near her, and after a few moments the conversation between Mrs. Fielding and Floyd died into monosyllables, and then ceased altogether, as they became absorbed in listening to the singular discussion going on between his uncle and Medora. Evidently Mr. Southwold had at last selected a topic which deeply interested her, for she was listening with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, as he said:

"I maintain, Miss Fielding, that all women should be sincere Christians, because your sex owes everything to the elevating influences of that system of religion."

Medora, a little excitedly.—"I agree with you perfectly so far as this: all women should, if possible, be deeply imbued with the spirit of true piety; but this for their own sakes, as the surest guide through the thorny paths of existence. I deny that they owe any special debt of gratitude to Christianity."

Mr. Southwold.—"You do not surely wish to imply that it is not that which has raised them from the rank of slaves to their present high position?"

Medora.—"Yes, sir, I do!"

Mrs. Fielding, interrupting.—"My darling Medora, do not be rash."

Medora.—"I do not intend to be, my dear mamma, but I insist upon this, that our sex is indebted for the place it now holds, not to Christian, but to Pagan influences."

Floyd, startled and horrified.—"*Pagan?*"

MEDORA.—"Yes! Allow me to explain myself. No nation has ever assigned to us so noble a rank as the ancient Scandinavians—those northern barbarians—who worshipped Odin and dreamed of the fair Alruna maidens. They regarded their wives as companions to be consulted on all important occasions, and when their resistless hordes swept over Europe, conquering everywhere by their stalwart arms and dauntless courage, they carried with them those pure women, whose smiles inspired their boldest deeds. It was their example, and the terror of their name, which forced the Christian nations of the South to respect as well as to admire their gentle sisters; and from that moment the supremacy of our sex was established."

"Eloquently argued," cried Floyd, regarding with undisguised admiration the beautiful girl, who, with her clear blue eyes, and clustering golden hair, was in herself a splendid specimen of that blonde race, from whom, doubtless, in some remote age, her ancestry sprung.

MR. SOUTHWOLD, calmly.—"Yes, Miss Fielding certainly pleads her cause well; but I think by so doing she strikes at one of the most exquisite corroborations of Christianity."

MEDORA.—"I trust not; for I can scarcely imagine it to be necessary to the maintenance of a true faith that we should believe all the false arguments which enthusiasts have adduced in its support."

MR. SOUTHWOLD.—"Armed at all points, I see."

FLOYD, rising, and approaching Medora.—"Yes! uncle; you will find it difficult to vanquish one who has already conquered so many."

Mr. Southwold was by no means satisfied with the

result of his attack, and would have liked to prolong the contest further, but Medora gracefully turned to converse with his nephew, and very soon after he rose, taking leave of the ladies with much formal and stately politeness.

Floyd lingered, and was rewarded by a few moments alone with Medora. After that, it was useless for Mr. Southwold to reason with his nephew's infatuated devotion; for all the arguments he could urge against that fair woman, were a thousand times outweighed by the rapture of her parting kiss.

CHAPTER XX.

"Je descends dans la tombe où tu m'as condamnée."
Cinna.—PIERRE CORNEILLE.

"Love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave."
THE SONG OF SOLOMON.

As soon as Lascelles discovered that Floyd and his uncle had left town, he made another attempt to see Medora, but failed in obtaining an interview. She had censured so severely the conduct of the servant who on that last occasion permitted him to pass unannounced, that when he again presented himself, the man insisted upon taking up his card, returning speedily with the information that Miss Fielding was "not at home."

Baffled and disappointed he was still watchful of her movements, and twice ventured upon joining her on the street, but each time, after they had walked a short distance, she quitted him at the door of a store with a polite "Good morning" that forbad his lingering. On the second of these unsatisfactory encounters, she informed him that she was about leaving town to visit Mrs. Clarkson, and two days afterwards he heard of her departure.

From that moment he was restlessly desirous of following her, not that he had any definite plans of action, or hopes of what might be gained by persisting in his

evidently disagreeable attentions, but he had a vague idea that some unforeseen event might possibly occur to throw Medora once more within his power. Relying with miserable vanity upon his personal influence, he imagined that much might be accomplished to retard, at least, if not wholly to prevent her union with Floyd. It is doubtful whether he would ever have succeeded in originating a plausible excuse for establishing himself in her neighborhood had not accident favored him just as he was almost despairing.

He received a letter from Mr. Ashley, who was a distant relative of his wife's, urging him to come to Ash Grove with "Lucy and the baby," as they trusted the change might benefit her. The returning mail carried his answer, in which he accepted the invitation for himself, while "deeply regretting that the state of Mrs. Lascelles' health would not at present admit of her leaving home."

After having despatched the reply beyond all possibility of recall, and completed every arrangement for leaving, he went to inform his wife of his proposed departure. He had postponed this interview thus late because he dreaded it a little, as he expected that she would oppose his going. He entered the darkened room rather nervously. At his appearance Mrs. Hartly rose from her place at Lucy's pillow, and he was left alone with his wife. Approaching the bed he was somewhat startled by her extremely fragile appearance, but it did not suit his plans to notice it, and he said cheerfully,

"Well, Lucy, I have come to bid you good bye."

"Good bye! are you going to leave me, Walter?"

she asked in a low, hollow voice, and with a sudden look of pain.

"Yes, I intend to run up the river for a short visit at the Ashleys; they asked you to come too, but I wrote that you were not well enough."

Alas! for his poor wife, she remembered instantly that Ash Grove was very near Lazy-Bank, where her dreaded rival was staying. She suspected that to be his real reason for leaving her, and the tears which she was too weak to repress started to her eyes as she faltered—

"Oh, Walter, do not go away now; I am so ill that I cannot bear it."

"Nonsense, Lucy!" replied her husband impatiently. "You shut yourself up here, until it really makes you sick; if you would only go out, now that it is warm, you would soon be well."

"Walter!" said Lucy solemnly, looking at him with her sad, soft eyes: "Walter, I shall never be well again; I am dying."

He was a good deal startled, and answered hastily—

"Don't say that, Lucy—don't say that!"

"Oh, Walter! oh, my own dear husband!" exclaimed Lucy, with sudden energy seizing his hand. "Do not leave me now, it is but a short time I have to live; only stay with me, only tell me that you love me a little."

The imploring look and tone touched him; something like contrition and repentance crept into his cold heart. He stooped down and kissed her with more tenderness than he had shown in a long time. She clung around his neck, exclaiming—

"Thank you, thank you! Dearest Walter, you make

me so happy, I love you so much! I do not care for illness, if you only are kind!"

Perhaps he might have yielded to her entreaties and remained, but at that moment a feeble wail was heard from the adjoining room, and the nurse entered, bringing the child. When she saw them approaching, Lucy released her hold of her husband, and stretched out her hand to take the infant, while a bright smile of maternal love shed its halo over her wan face, giving her a momentary appearance of renewed health. Somewhat reassured by this, Lascelles rose.

"Well, Lucy, the baby will atone for my absence. I really must go. Good-bye!" he quitted the room, perhaps not hearing, certainly not heeding, the wild, imploring cry—

"Walter! Walter! Walter!" until her voice sank into a whisper.

Mrs. Hartly hurriedly returned, finding the patient convulsed with sobs; much alarmed, she entreated her to be calm.

"No, no!" cried Lucy passionately; "he has gone! he leaves me alone, to follow that detestable woman. No, no! I will not be quiet! I do not care if it does kill me!"

"Lucy," said Mrs. Hartly gently, "remember your child."

She checked her sobs a little at this, and pressed her infant to her bosom, covering it with trembling, passionate kisses. Then Mrs. Hartly urged upon the poor, heart-stricken woman all those words of consolation, of which she herself so well knew the power, and succeeded at last in soothing her into calmness. Yet it was but

too evident that this violent emotion had been most dangerous in its effects upon her already enfeebled condition.

The unhappiness he left behind him, did not weigh long on Lascelles' spirits, and he arrived at Mr. Ashley's exultant with the thought of his proximity to Medora. He exerted himself to the utmost to make an agreeable impression, and succeeded as well as he ever could, for even in his moments of the utmost suavity there was a sinister look in his eyes and a jarring hollowness in his laugh, that filled you with a vague uneasiness.

One day of devotion to his fair cousins secured him a few moments of liberty the following morning, of which he availed himself to take a solitary walk.

Bright June, crowned with roses and laden with strawberries, smiled upon the earth, and all nature laughed back a glad response. With keen sensuality Lascelles really enjoyed the sweet sights and smells around him; and arrived at Lazy-Bank, his cheeks flushed, and his eyes sparkling with a feeling of renewed health and vigor.

It would have been at that moment difficult to discover a more astonished person than Mrs. Clarkson, when from the piazza she beheld him coming up the avenue. She was so far startled out of her ordinary tact as to accompany her surprised greeting with the *mal-à-propos* inquiry,—

"Where is your wife?"

"I left her in New York," replied Lascelles, a little confused. "I am only here for a few days on business," he added, with ready mendacity.

Mrs. Clarkson conducted him into the little morning

room, where Medora was seated, who had heard his voice a few moments before, with a sudden start, but she was perfectly calm and self-possessed when he entered, greeting him with apparently the utmost indifference. Lascelles had already learned that any direct avowals were entirely useless, and his object now being to restore her confidence in the propriety of his conduct, that she might once more permit his attentions, he was careful to maintain a conversation of mere commonplaces, even when Mrs. Clarkson excused herself, and they were left alone.

Half an hour later, Mr. Southwold, riding over to Lazy-Bank to pay a call of courtesy to his nephew's *fiancée*, found Lascelles and Medora still *tête-à-tête* in the boudoir. He was somewhat surprised at the combination, especially when he was presented to the gentleman, and identified him as the son-in-law of Mr. Wentworth, of whom he had heard, but whom he had never before met. With keen watchfulness, he was instantly on the alert, to see if there was anything more between them than appeared at the first glance.

"Has it been gay here this spring?" inquired Medora, after an awkward pause.

Mr. Southwold.—"No, we are waiting for Mrs. Clarkson to begin the season with one of her delightful parties."

Lascelles.—"It certainly could not have a more auspicious opening. Her entertainments are always charming."

Mr. Southwold.—"Yes, I think her ball last winter was much the most brilliant at which I was present."

Lascelles.—"I was not there, but the one she gave a year ago was generally considered a great success."

He could not forbear a stolen glance at Medora as he spoke, and despite all her self-possession, as the scene of that evening rushed to her memory, a momentary flush overspread her face. Mr. Southwold caught both the look and the blush, and convinced that there was some mystery here, he followed up his suspicions by saying—

"Perhaps, Mr. Lascelles, you have some peculiarly agreeable associations with it. If I recollect aright, it occurred just before you were married. When—what is Moore says?

> "'There's nothing half so sweet in life
> As love's young dream.'"

Medora had entirely recovered herself, and added calmly:

"Yes, I remember, that was the first time that I heard of Mr. Lascelles' engagement."

Lascelles gave a short forced laugh, that wrinkled his face into the very incarnation of everything that was sinister, as he endeavored to reply carelessly:

"Yes, it is but little over a year since I was married."

Mr. Southwold was not deceived by this, he was only confirmed in his suspicions, and he mentally determined not to lose so good an occasion for sowing the seeds of distrust in his nephew's heart.

All this Medora's quick perceptions detected. She was uneasily fearful of the consequences of the unfortunate meeting. Evidently Mr. Southwold was a formidable antagonist. What was to be done? This question plunged her into thought, as profound as ever exercised the crafty brain of the unscrupulous Borgia.

CHAPTER XXI.

"An unquestioning faith is an excellent shield for defence, but a poor weapon of attack.

OUR COLLEGE.

"Is there a heaven, and Gods; and can it be,
They should so slowly hear, so slowly see?"

Catiline.—BEN JONSON.

FLOYD had passed a most delightful month at Stratford. His mother listened with untiring interest to his enthusiastic praises of Medora's beauty, banishing every selfish and jealous feeling in the pleasure of seeing his happiness. When he had fully explained to her the position in which he stood with regard to his uncle and his ladye-love, Mrs. Southwold at once urged upon him the advantages of the course which his own honorable feelings pointed out, that he should immediately begin the labors by which he hoped to win independence. Indeed she could not repress a secret joy at the thought, that should he resign his home at Southwold, she might once more be his constant companion and adviser. Floyd fully concurred in her views; and when he quitted her, had determined to delay no longer his preparations for the future, and to permit himself not more than a single fortnight at his uncle's.

During his entire stay he did not see Nannie; she left for her home before his arrival, and did not return until after he left. He never suspected her secret, which her aunt, with honorable care, guarded, as if it had been her own.

He had solaced his absence from Medora, as lovers are wont, by writing long passionate letters, to which she replied as tenderly as he could wish. As soon as he was informed of her arrival at Lazy-Bank he was impatient to be at Southwold, yet he would not curtail the promised period of his visit to his mother, so that a week had elapsed before he reached there. Then chancing to arrive by a train in which he was not expected, he found his uncle out, and rode at once to Lazy-Bank, without awaiting his return.

The short period of his absence from his ladye-love had seemed an age to him, and he met her again, rapturous as the Hindu Rama, when he embraced Siva, after a separation of a thousand years.

Medora, who was full of uneasiness since that encounter with Mr. Southwold of the preceding day, was somewhat relieved to hear that Floyd had not yet seen his uncle, although a new cause of anxiety suggested itself when he spoke of his mother's counsels, and announced his resolution of only remaining at Southwold a short time, and then addressing himself to the study of his profession.

She had no time to discuss this proposal at length, for he could not linger long, as courtesy demanded that he should announce his arrival to his uncle; and after a happy half hour, therefore, he departed full of blissful thoughts.

Yet, he had not been long with Mr. Southwold when a few careless words rudely awoke him from his bright dreams, accompanied as they were with the singular question—

"By the way, was Miss Fielding ever engaged to Mr. Lascelles?"

Floyd's indignant denials failed to reassure even himself. He was wretched till he saw Medora again, and then it needed all the eloquent protestations of which she was mistress, to lull him once more into his former affectionate trust.

This incident proved to her, that her apprehensions concerning Mr. Southwold's hostile opposition were by no means without foundation, and rendered her more impatient of her trying situation, and more fully alive to its dangers. She could think of no possible extrication from her embarrassments. Very soon, unless some new combination occurred, Floyd would be removed wholly beyond the sphere of her influence, and meantime she was subjected to a most annoying *espionage*.

It was impossible for her to avoid meeting Lascelles. He came constantly to the house, and without assigning some reason she could not help treating him politely, although she felt that he was watching her eagerly, only waiting an opportunity and a pretext for renewing his annoying importunities. Mr. Southwold regarded her closely, in hopes of finding some flaw that might open his nephew's eyes to her true character, whilst Floyd followed with loving attention her every word and gesture.

To a thoroughly virtuous heart, the escape from these difficulties would have been simple. An open avowal to

her lover of the whole history of her entanglement with Lascelles would at once have rid her of his unfortunate presence, and rendered Mr. Southwold's insinuations unavailing. This course never suggested itself to Medora; she was only desperately resolute to remove from her path all obstacles to success by the first means that circumstances suggested, no matter how unscrupulous. Regarding Mr. Southwold as her most formidable antagonist, she often fiercely longed to have him once securely within her power.

Her harassing situation rendered her more than usually cynical and impatient in her conversation, and she rarely met Floyd without uttering some sentiment that raised a cloud on his brow which was only dispelled by her endearments and caresses. Thus far, these all-powerful weapons in the hands of a beautiful woman had never failed of success, and she often exulted in the thought that his affection remained unchanged and unchangeable.

One morning Floyd and Medora sat in the boudoir, where so many happy hours had been spent. They had been speaking of the late failure of a large banking-house which had recently been announced.

"When I first heard of it," said Floyd, "I was a good deal concerned for one of my Stratford friends, a poor man, who could ill afford to lose his money, and who I knew had always kept his accounts with Harcourt—but it seems that for some unaccountable reason he had drawn out his balance only two days before the crash."

"That was fortunate."

"How strange are such apparently unfounded presentiments!" said Floyd, musingly.

"They are what some persons would call 'Special Providences.'"

"Certainly," exclaimed Floyd, surprised; "do you not regard them in that light?"

"I? no indeed! I have very little patience with that favorite doctrine of the superstitious."

"I consider it," replied Floyd gravely, "one of the most beautiful and consoling points of faith."

"I am sorry I cannot agree with you," said Medora, impatiently, "but unfortunately I have seen too much of the absurdities to which such a belief leads. Why there are my aunts, the Misses Clinton, they regard everything as Providential, from the death of a friend to the hiring of a new scullion!"

"But of course it is almost impious to apply so sacred a word to trifles."

"I beg your pardon, but it seems to me, that to the Almighty there must be very little difference between the care of a few thousands, and the character of a servant. In His eyes both concerns must be equally insignificant."

"What, do you not believe that He who heeds every 'sparrow that falleth to the ground,' does not carefully guard even our slightest act and deed?"

"I hardly know. It is to me an immense audacity to hope it, and a thought too stupendous for realization."

"But you forget that God is *omnipotent*."

"To a certain point, yes, but even His power has limits. He can never make two and two more or less than four, or alter any other mathematical truth."

"No, but remember that He made the laws upon which their existence depends."

"Perhaps so, but after all it is almost inconceivable that He can work such results as are attributed to Him when you reflect that necessarily He lives as we do, moment by moment."

"Not at all, the existence of the Almighty is infinite."

"What! Is it conceivable that He can live in the past, which is of course hopelessly gone, or in the future which has not yet come? Manifestly not. He may possess omniscient memory and prescience, but He cannot actually *be* except at this present second of time."

"Yet it seems a species of insult to Deity, to suppose His existence is as limited as our own."

"I will give you authority for it, which to you should be unanswerable. What else does this expression signify: I am the great Jehovah, 'which was, and is, and is to come?' A measureless immortality, certainly, but one that is bounded by seconds."

"Medora! sometimes you seem to me a fearful woman! Why did you say just now, 'authority that to *me* must be unanswerable?' Do not you believe in the Bible?"

"*Believe!* Did you ever reflect how carelessly that word is used? My dear friend, I have been educated to regard the Bible as inspired, but I am not yet prepared to say whether, on my own deliberate investigation, I credit its every word."

Floyd, exceedingly displeased and shocked, and very desirous to close this distasteful discussion, rose, exclaiming impetuously, "Stop! stop, Medora, you chill me to the heart when you speak thus."

Medora, alarmed at his tone, making haste to soothe

his indignation, said sadly, "Floyd, I would give very much,—more than I can express—for an unquestioning faith. Hereafter, when I am constantly with you, will you have the patience to teach me all in which I am so deficient?"

This question restored him to her side, though still full of gentle chidings and earnest entreaties to the daring girl to give up this flippant cavilling and defiant incredulity, and seek with humble trust the only certain hope of everlasting peace.

This conversation was but a prototype of many that followed, all, however, terminating in the same way. Floyd, with the delicacy of a true gentleman, was always extremely averse to an argument with a lady, especially on religion; convinced that drawing-room polemics were not calculated either to convince or to convert, and that controversy was more apt to fix than to eradicate any erroneous views.

However bold and even unfeminine Medora was in her opinions, she was ever irresistible when she laid aside the sophistical logician for the fascinating woman. Feeling this, she grew every day more confident in her power over her lover, and noting his untiring devotion, exulted in the thought that her empire could never be successfully disputed.

So the moments of that fortnight flowed on silver waves in the river of Time. For, despite the occasional clouds, these were halcyon days to Floyd, and long afterwards the brightest spot in his heart's history was the halo that lingered around their memory.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Come andando infinite anime di quelli miseri mortalli che nella disgrazia di Dio morivano, allo inferno tutte, o la maggior parté si dolevano non per altro che per aver tolta moglie essersi a tanta infelicità condotte."

Novella de Belfajor.—NICOLO MACHIAVELLI.

——— "So shall you hear
* * * * *
Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;
Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause,
And in this upshot, purposes mistook,
Fall'n on the inventors' heads."

Hamlet.—SHAKSPEARE.

FINDING that mere insinuation was powerless to shake Floyd's allegiance to his beautiful mistress, Mr. Southwold determined to give him some convincing proof that his suspicions were not wholly without foundation. In order to effect this it was absolutely necessary that his nephew should see Lascelles and Medora together. This seemed a combination very unlikely to occur, as, although he was himself satisfied, from several trifling circumstances, that Lascelles was a constant visitor at Lazy-Bank, it was very evident that he always disappeared before Floyd's arrival.

There was even little probability of their meeting at

any gay entertainment, as Lascelles' mourning would prevent him from accepting an invitation to anything larger than a dinner-party. As this thought presented itself, Mr. Southwold determined that he would not allow even the slender chance of the possible result of such an encounter to escape him. Accordingly, with Floyd's pleased concurrence, he invited the Ashleys, with Lascelles, Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson, and Medora, to dine at Southwold.

As yet there had been no really warm weather, and as it was but an informal party, his ordinary dinner hour of four o'clock was not altered. The long drawing-room was perfumed with roses, and the drawn shades toned the too brilliant sunlight to a mellow glow, when the first guests arrived. It was the party from Ashgrove, and Mr. Southwold was struck with an appearance of restlessness and excitement in Lascelles' manner. He was instantly on the alert to learn the cause, and when it only appeared, in the course of conversation, that he had taken a lonely drive that morning, with a view to discovering where, Mr. Southwold said—

"We have many fine points of view about us. I trust, Mr. Lascelles, that you turned your horse's steps in some pleasant direction."

"I only went to the village and back," he answered hastily, "I had no time for more."

"I beg pardon," rejoined Mr. Southwold, "I fancied it was a mere trip in search of the beautiful. Oh! here are Mrs. Clarkson and Miss Fielding."

He saw that Lascelles changed color a little as he turned to Medora, but to his annoyance Floyd was too absorbed to notice it.

When the servant announced dinner, Mr. Southwold requested Lascelles to lead her out, himself offering his arm to Mrs. Clarkson and giving her the head of the table. Taking the foot, he placed Medora at his right hand, with Floyd and one of the Misses Ashley opposite.

The first courses went on much as usual, with very little conversation. Medora evidently did not like her situation, and carefully avoided anything more than commonplaces with her companion until the arrival of dessert, when the talking became louder and she insensibly fell into a discussion with Lascelles. Observing, however, Mr. Southwold and Floyd looking earnestly at her, she instantly turned to the former and explained—

"We were speaking of Harcourt's unfortunate failure."

Mr. Southwold.—"Poor fellow! I believe it was very disastrous."

Lascelles.—"They say it was all his wife's fault."

Medora, indignantly.—"Of course they do. No man ever does anything wrong or foolish that people do not blame either his wife or mother."

Mr. S.—"And generally with great justice. I must confess I coincide entirely in the sentiment of that eastern monarch who inquired when anything untoward occurred, 'What woman did this?'"

M.—"There is one consolation in that view of affairs. You accord an enormous amount of influence and responsibility to us ladies."

Mr. S.—"Unfortunately for the world such is undoubtedly the case."

M., excitedly.—"Unfortunately?"

Mr. S.—"Yes! for the fascinations of your sex, and their many amiable qualities, give them a power over ours which they are too much creatures of feeling to wield judiciously."

Medora was a little provoked, but she fancied this might have been said to draw her out, and therefore resorted to what was with her a favorite mode of closing a controversy,—a quotation.

"I see, Mr. Southwold, that you agree with Lord Chesterfield's heterodox sentiment, 'Women are only children of a larger growth.'"

She had, however, an antagonist who was not easily silenced, for he replied instantly, "I go farther than that, and say with La Rochefoucauld, '*L'esprit de la plupart des femmes sert plus à fortifier leur folie que leur raison.*'"

Medora was beaten with her own weapons, and although sufficiently mistress of herself to betray no annoyance, as Mr. Southwold had hoped, she rose from the table with a feeling of mortal aversion to that self-complacent old man, who stood in the way of her success and thwarted her at every turn.

At a bachelor's party there is rarely any restraint, and half an hour after dinner the guests were amusing themselves each one as they saw fit. Mrs. Clarkson and the Misses Ashley formed a group around the piano, the gentlemen strolling about with their cigars. No one was surprised that Mr. Southwold and Lascelles went off to view the recent improvements. The penetrating old gentleman had urged this walk upon his companion with the intention of discovering, if possible, how far his suspicions with regard to his former intimacy with Miss

Fielding were correct, and of finding some clue to his embarrassment in regard to the morning's ride. They had not been gone long when Floyd and Medora followed their example and started for a stroll.

The quiet hush of summer twilight was gathering around them as they reached the shore of the river. They came out upon a high bank which had been cut into by the railroad, leaving a great mass of rocks and bushes on its outer side. It was here that Mr. Southwold had planted his most successful screen, so that, in the direction of the house until you came quite to the edge of the chasm, it was impossible to guess that the original symmetry of the hill had been disfigured by the huge excavation with its almost perpendicular rocky sides.

The lovers looked out on the river, now rapidly shrouding in shadow—the grey hills opposite frowning gloomily, —and the village at their base, where a few straggling lights already gleamed through the increasing darkness. Medora's hand rested in Floyd's. Their conversation had ceased, and they stood there enjoying that delicious stillness that is not silence, so suggestive of the myriad forms of summer life. This sweet calm was rudely broken by the shriek of an approaching railroad train, and a moment after the voice of Mr. Southwold, from the other side of the deep cut, exclaimed:

"That is a jarring discord to disturb the harmonies of such an hour, and such a scene."

"Why! Uncle, are you there?" said Floyd, a little startled.

"Yes! Mr. Lascelles was with me, but I believe he has gone back to the house. Indeed, I think it is time we should all return."

As he spoke they saw the boughs of a thick bush, opposite, tremble for an instant, as if some one was pressing against them; it was so near the edge that Floyd in alarm cried out:

"Take care!"

The warning came too late,—perhaps indeed the sudden start which followed the words was itself fatal. The bush, as if overborne by some great weight, swayed above the yawning chasm—then its branches parted,—there was a sharp crash, a wild shriek—and Mr. Southwold fell headlong down the steep rocks, striking on the sandy track below with that horrible crashing sound that tells of shattered bones and mangled flesh. For one awful instant there was heard no word or voice, only the roaring noise of the approaching train, that swept steadily on, and in another moment would pass over that prostrate form. Then the air was rent with a sharp fearful cry:

"Floyd! Floyd! Floyd, for God's sake help me! I am dreadfully injured. I cannot move. I shall be killed!"

During that first interval of silence Medora's heart was full of an exultant joy as she thought that the only obstacle between herself and fortune was removed. When she heard those words and knew that the old man, she detested, still lived, with a sudden revengeful desperation she wound her arms around her lover and hissed in his ear:

"Are you mad? Let him die!"

Again from out that dark chasm, which already the gathering shades shrouded in obscurity, came those heart-rending shrieks—

"Floyd! Floyd! Floyd! Help me! Help me!"

All the stern dignity of that stricken man was gone; there was a supplicatory tone in his hoarse voice that was piteous to hear, as he lay there powerless in present anguish, and the awful fear of that swiftly approaching death.

His horrified nephew writhed in the clinging grasp of those strong white arms.

"Let me go, murderess! Let me go!"

In his agony he cursed that remorseless woman, and with a desperate effort wrenched himself free from that fearful embrace.

Too late! Too late! He dashed down the steep hill, but a long line of light flashed through the darkness—one awful shriek that rang out even above the rush and roar, and the resistless train rolled on, and was lost in the black night.

Down in that fatal chasm Floyd found no living thing—only the sickening spectacle of the disjointed remains of a human being crushed out of existence like a worm.

Above on the bank, Medora, with white cheeks and calm brow, turned slowly away—and behold she stood face to face with Lascelles. In his blanched countenance, and the triumphant light of his eyes, she read that he had been an unseen witness of her frightful crime. At that overwhelming thought a strange giddiness seized her. It seemed as if reason was about to desert her, and with a low cry she staggered forward, and would have fallen had he not encircled her in his outstretched arms. Seeing that she had fainted, and was incapable of resistance, he pressed her to his breast with reckless ardor, and in the purple gloom on that

lonely hill over which the night wind moaned drearily, —that coward heart and that cruel heart beat side by side.

Summoned by his cries, some workmen at last came to Floyd's assistance, and raised on a rude litter that shapeless mass that was all that now remained of what one short hour before had been a hale and stately man. He gave a few brief words of explanation, unsatisfactory indeed, for he himself could but guess what fatal accident led to the first catastrophe, but instinctively concealing the final crime. Then, in stern silence, he accompanied the men who bore that burden to the house, never so much as looking back for the perpetrator of this fearful deed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"And hot lips to suck forth
A lost soul from me."
The Demon Lady.—MOTHERWELL.

"Morn, in the white wake of the morning star,
Came furrowing all the orient into gold."
The Princess.—TENNYSON.

"Je suivois mon devoir, et vous cédiez au vôtre,
Rien ne vous engageoit à m'aimer en effet."
Andromaque.—RACINE.

WHEN Medora recovered from her swoon, she was still clasped in a passionate embrace. She was utterly bewildered and confused, and struggled wildly to escape; but Lascelles pressed her tighter, as he whispered—

"Now you are mine for ever!"

Recalled by these words to horrible recollection, and stung by the implied hold upon her that he had just obtained, she said haughtily—

"Even now you shall not insult me with impunity."

"It is scarcely an insult, Medora. I am almost a widower; I have been telegraphed to hasten home—Lucy is dying."

"My God!" exclaimed Medora, starting back with horror; "And you can be here! and speak thus!"

"I love you so much," murmured Lascelles.

"Stop!" cried Medora indignantly. "I cannot and I will not listen to you. Let me go!"

She sprang down the hill and walked rapidly towards the house. Yet, as she advanced, her steps grew slower and slower; she was struggling desperately against the overwhelming thoughts that each moment grew more intense, the horrible knowledge that her soul was stained with a fearful crime, and that the guilt of murder would cling to her for ever and for ever.

With a mighty effort of her dauntless will, she stifled back this remembrance to the secret depths of her heart, where it was evermore to lurk a hideous horror, that would destroy all happiness and blast every pleasure, and summoned all her fortitude and presence of mind to her aid, to enable her to meet unflinchingly all inquiring glances.

She entered the house quietly, arriving there almost as soon as Floyd, in time to corroborate his first hasty accounts. Her pale cheeks and disordered dress excited no remark: it was but natural that the spectator of such a scene should be stunned with its shock.

Mrs. Clarkson, for once calmed into complete sobriety, gave a few kind and judicious directions to the distracted household, and then, as Medora appeared so overcome as to require rest, she drove away.

Floyd was left alone with his murdered uncle; a dreadful sense of misery and despair oppressed him; how willingly would he have resigned that fatal inheritance to restore life to that shattered form, and to bring back once again the loving confidence that had led him to believe that being an angel who was in reality a fiend.

In this reflection was the worst sense of his bereavement; he had loved, with the whole force of his affectionate nature, that beautiful woman, and now those white hands were stained with blood—that virgin soul was black with crime!

Hour after hour of that long night rolled slowly away, and he restlessly paced the floor of the long drawing-room, where the corpse had been laid out. Ever as he glanced at that shrouded figure, he vowed sternly that his first act should be to free himself from the pledge that bound him to a murderess. He felt now in all their force his uncle's repeated warnings, and blamed his blind infatuation that they came too late. He read at once the whole black history of Medora's past conduct; he felt an absolute conviction that she had never loved him; trifling or forgotten circumstances rushed to his memory to strengthen this condemning belief, and perhaps this thought, more than any other, nerved him to the unflinching determination to cast her off for ever. Beyond that, he was too overcome to venture to look. Love was dead—hope, he had none; he would gladly have lain down beside that dead man, and slumbered in the same unconsciousness.

If that was a fearful night to Floyd, how many thousand times more so was it to Medora, shut up alone with the memory of unexpected and unforgiven sin. Sleep never for one instant visited her weary eyes; the darkness was alive with shapes of horror; the silence was full of appalling sounds; those despairing shrieks that had vainly called to stony ears, rang out again and again; she seemed to see that crushed body, which in reality she had not beheld, in every horrible form of muti-

lation, until pressing her hands to her brow, she sprang from the bed which was no couch of rest to her, and leaned from the open window to cool the fever that consumed her.

Outside the stars glittered brightly on a world sleeping in calmness and peace. There was a dewy chill in the air that struck to her heart like ice. Shivering she turned away, as the thought came over her of how that murdered man would lie in the damp ground, ever looking up at the bright sun, the pale moon, and the silent stars, calling down nameless curses on the woman who had banished him from the beautiful world to that cold resting-place.

A strange bewilderment crept over her brain; the gloom around oppressed her with unutterable terror; she seemed to see it peopled with chattering demons and gibbering ghosts; and she, who had never known fear, hastened with trembling hands and quivering lips to strike a light that might dispel these imaginary terrors. Reassured in a measure by the rays of the candle, which showed her that she was alone in her luxurious apartment, she smiled with scorn at her own weakness.

"Fool!" she said, impatiently; "surely I am sufficiently mistress of myself to cast aside these childish apprehensions, and contemplate the future with calmness?"

Once more she threw herself upon the bed, and began to think earnestly of what was next to be done. Of course she expected that Floyd would be indignant at her act, but, confident in those fascinations which had so often brought him to the side when he seemed for a

moment shocked into coldness, she fancied herself secure of the reward of her iniquity.

She was still pondering on the first inevitable interview which would decide all, when the ruddy light of summer morning stole into the room, and she knew that the hateful night was past. Feeling the absolute necessity of refreshment after her weary vigil, she rose, and hastily dressing herself, went out for a walk.

In the east great masses of purple clouds lay piled against the amber sky; every blade of grass and little flower was heavy with clinging dew, and hundreds of faery webs sparkled on the lawn. It was very early; the great world of men still slumbered, but all animated nature was awake and astir. Everywhere little birds chanted their matin songs, and myriads of insects hummed and buzzed in the bright morning air. Gradually the crimson of the east faded into pale yellow, a few slant sunbeams tinged the hill-tops, and then the monarch of day flashed in dazzling glory on the earth. The river, which a moment before had been liquid silver, was transmuted into burnished gold, and the dew-drops glittered with a thousand rainbow hues.

Very soon now there would be some one up about the house, and Medora returned to her room with a brain calmed and cooled by her early stroll. She made an elaborate toilette, and descended to the breakfast-room with very few traces of her sleepless night.

"Poor young Southwold," said Mrs. Clarkson, "I wonder how he is this morning. I shall drive over to see him after breakfast. I presume you would like to accompany me."

"Yes," replied Medora, "I feel quite anxious about him."

"A most shocking catastrophe!" continued Mrs. Clarkson, "I do not think I quite understand yet how it occurred."

Medora summoned all her fortitude to reply,

"I presume he was deceived by the bushes, and so approached too near the edge of the deep cut."

"But how strange that he should have slipped over just as the train arrived. Did he have no time to cry out?"

"He did call for assistance, but Floyd was too late."

"How dreadful it must have been for him;" then after a pause the lively lady added, "I wonder if his uncle left any will."

"I rather think not. Floyd told me once that he had never made any."

"Indeed! then your *fiancée* is sole heir. My dear, I congratulate you, he will be very rich."

Medora smiled faintly and turned quickly away; the effort of those last few moments had been too much for her, for suddenly as she stood there, surrounded by light and friends, that same horrible bewilderment of brain rushed over her; for a moment she was once more in darkness that was peopled with fearful shapes. Then with an effort of will she banished this strange oppression, and seated herself at the table.

As soon as the meal was over Mrs. Clarkson ordered the carriage, and an hour later they were on their way to Southwold. Medora began to fear that she had over-estimated her strength, and that she was unequal to the coming interview, so very feeble and weak did

she feel. But there was no possibility of avoiding it now, and she nerved herself with renewed resolution as they drove up to the door.

Floyd was in the library when he heard Mrs. Clarkson's voice, and a moment after Medora stood by his side. Her friend judged that the consolations she had to offer would be best bestowed in private, and after a moment discreetly withdrew, so that the lovers were alone. Floyd had risen on Medora's entrance and greeted her with a cold—

"Good morning, Miss Fielding."

He remained standing, regarding her with strange unwonted sternness. There was an interval of silence, and then Medora said falteringly—

"Floyd, have you not forgiven me?"

"Forgiven you?" he exclaimed with sudden energy. "Do not ask forgiveness of me, but of the mutilated corpse in yonder room, and the God whose first great commandment you have broken!"

"And you?"

"I have nothing to say, except that we must part for ever."

"Oh, Floyd! not that! I have been rash and cruel, but at that moment I thought of nothing but your interests and my love."

As she spoke she laid her hand on his, and drew so near him that her golden ringlets touched his shoulder. He was young,—he had loved that woman ardently, but he shrank from her offered caress, and drew coldly back. Looking down on those faultless features that might have been cut in marble, so clear and bloodless were they, he said slowly—

"Medora Fielding, you are very beautiful; I have worshipped you madly, but at this moment there is no feeling in my heart towards you but horror and pity, and I had far rather you should kill me also than to share my life with my uncle's murderess!"

Seeing the fixed determination expressed in those noble features, and realizing that there was no hope, a thousand despairing thoughts rushed through Medora's brain, her overtasked strength gave way, she staggered forward and fell heavily on the sofa, hiding her face in her clasped hands. Floyd did not approach her, he only said sadly—

"Believe me, I am sincerely sorry for you."

After a moment she recovered herself somewhat, and looking up, said faintly—

"At least you will not betray me."

"No," answered Floyd, gloomily, "it would be of no benefit; it cannot restore that dead man to life, to blast your name; no, I will never divulge the dreadful secret of his death. You are at liberty to give what explanation you please of our broken engagement, I shall not contradict anything you choose to say."

"Thank you," faltered Medora. She longed to say more, to make another attempt to regain her lost lover, and felt the absolute necessity for self-control, but so confused was her brain that she was scarcely mistress of her actions. She was aware of this, and therefore dared neither move nor speak.

Noticing her frightful pallor and the wild look of her glittering eyes, Floyd was touched with compassion; he half relented from his stern purpose, when on a sudden the thought recurred to him that her exhaustion and

suffering sprang not from disappointed love, but from the haunting memory of crime. Chilled into indignant severity, he said coldly—

"You are not well; allow me to call Mrs. Clarkson, and send you a glass of wine."

He left the room, and at that act, which she felt was final, Medora's little remaining fortitude deserted her, she sank down in a swoon, her last thought being a wild hope that the icy numbness which was stealing over her might be death.

Mrs. Clarkson was somewhat alarmed at Floyd's abrupt summons. She was conversing with Christian, who had ventured to ask her advice on one or two points he felt incompetent to decide himself, when Floyd entered the room and said hurriedly—

"Mrs. Clarkson, please go to Miss Fielding, I think she is ill; Christian, will you be good enough to take her a glass of wine?"

On entering the library she found Medora still insensible. With the assistance of one of the maids whom Christian had called, she hastened to apply the usual restoratives, and at last their exertions were rewarded by some signs of returning life. Medora opened wide her brilliant eyes, looking wildly about her for a moment, and then slowly and not without an effort came back the remembrance of all the dreadful past.

"Take me away," she said faintly.

"Yes, dear!" replied Mrs. Clarkson; "first drink this wine, and when you are strong enough we will go."

Medora hastily swallowed the offered cordial, and gathering her mantle around her, rose, resolute to linger no longer.

"I am ready," she said imperiously; "come!"

Mrs. Clarkson regarded her with some surprise, but followed in silence. In the hall they found Floyd, who had been anxiously pacing up and down during the past few minutes. He now came forward, and offered her his arm.

"Thank you," said Medora, drawing back, with all her ancient pride. "I require no assistance. Good morning, Mr. Southwold!"

With a haughty bow she passed on, walking with a firm step to the carriage, and entering it alone. But oh! how wearily she sank back on the cushions, when the momentary necessity for exertion was past.

Mrs. Clarkson, who was absolutely mystified by this scene, had sufficient tact to join her friend without betraying surprise, until the coach rolled away.

Floyd watched them till a turn of the road hid them from his view; then he felt that all was over between him and that beautiful woman whom he once so loved. He had done what his own sense of right and respect to his uncle's memory required. Nothing now remained except to count the long hours of the passing day. The passion that for the past year had been a part of his very existence was rooted up and destroyed entirely and for ever! It seemed to him that never again could he know happiness or hope in this world.

In this dark hour one only comfort suggested itself, and that was the gentle sympathy of his devoted mother. Well for him that he could look forward to that consolation, and that he had her bright example to assure him that all female virtue had not ceased to exist; for with the overwhelming shock of his first discovery,

that she whom he had believed to be all that was lovely and pure, was in reality false and wicked, there was great danger that he might lose that confidence in womanly excellence, which is so essential to the moral well-being of every man.

The funeral was appointed for the following morning, and he expected Mrs. Southwold that evening, as she had been telegraphed the night previously. It seemed to him as if the hours had never crept so slowly before: it was impossible for him to fix his attention to anything but the hideous past and the sad future. He wandered about restless and miserable, until the declining day brought again before him, in all its vividness, the dreadful scene that the last twilight had witnessed. Contrasting his lost happiness with the sad present, his fortitude at length gave way, and he sank down, overwhelmed with the weight of woe.

From this stupor of grief he was roused by a gentle touch, and looking up, his mother stood by his side: she had arrived earlier than he had expected, and he had no time to summon up the calmness with which he had intended to meet her, but flinging himself into her arms, the sorrow he had so long suppressed found vent, and he sobbed like a little child.

In vain Mrs. Southwold soothed him with tender words and caresses; he refused to be comforted, until alarmed by this outburst of despair, she said entreatingly:—

"My dear Floyd! my dearest boy, do not distress yourself so much; you have still a bright future before you."

"No, mother. None! None! No hope but in your tenderness."

"And Miss Fielding?"

Floyd looked up. "Mother," he said mournfully, "all that is over. She never loved me, and I must forget her."

Although very much surprised Mrs. Southwold did not urge the point at that time. From her inmost heart she pitied her son, and with that gentle sympathy that only a mother can feel she suggested all noble consolations, until he felt and realized that dark as his future in this world now appeared, it might still be brightened with celestial light.

The funeral was attended by all the gentry of the neighborhood. Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson were present, and some remark was excited by Miss Fielding's absence. A strange report was started, that gained ground from receiving no denial, that the engagement between herself and Mr. Southwold was broken off.

At length everything was over. The splendid coffin that contained those poor remains of that once handsome man was deposited in the great family vault, there to rest with the unknown mystery of his death, until that dreadful day of accounts when the secrets of all hearts shall appear.

The crowd dispersed; Floyd Southwold and his mother returned to that elegant house that was now their home, that noble inheritance which was at last his own, there to lead a quiet life of study and retirement that was henceforth to be rarely interrupted.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"When a man marries a woman seized of an estate of inheritance, that is of lands and tenements in fee-simple, or fee tail; and has by her issue, born alive, which was capable of inheriting her estate; in this case he shall, on the death of his wife, hold the lands for his life as *tenant by the courtesy*."

BLACKSTONE'S COMMENTARIES.

"In case the intestate shall die without lawful descendants, and leaving a father, the inheritance shall go to such father."

REVISED STATUTES, NEW YORK.

WHEN Lascelles, on his solitary visit to the village, received the telegram informing him of his wife's alarming illness, his first thought was to conceal the nature of the message, in order that nothing might prevent him from accepting the evening's invitation to Southwold, where he was sure of meeting Medora. With sublime heartlessness, therefore, he appeared in his usual spirits until that awful catastrophe sent the guests home in haste. Then finding that he had time to take the last train for New York, he feigned to have discovered the dispatch awaiting him at Ash Grove, and at once returned to the city.

He had not been at home long when an anxiety suggested itself that had never before occurred to him, and that made him hang with the most anxious solicitude over the pillow of his dying wife and the cradle of his

infant: this was the dread lest the daughter should not survive the mother, and he should thus lose his control over the wealth which he had sacrificed so much to obtain. Up to this time he had really taken so little interest in his child that it had never struck him how very delicate she was, and now it was a thought of harassing agony that the whole of his vast fortune hung upon the single thread of her waning life.

His anxieties upon this point banished even the faint show of tenderness, that must have been paid by a nature less selfish than his, to the patient endurance of his suffering wife. All his thoughts were absorbed in the state of the wailing infant, who had grown feebler day by day, until it seemed as if its life was ebbing with its mother's, as momentarily they drew nearer to the awful gates of death. Lascelles was absolutely sickened by the torturing suspense, and, unable to sleep or eat, wandered restlessly between the two darkened chambers.

He was too much absorbed in his tormenting speculations to notice that he was closely watched both by Mrs. Hartly and the child's nurse; by the former with warm indignation at his utter heartlessness, and by the latter, who was a shrewd, unscrupulous Englishwoman, with a suspicion of his fears, and a keen hope of being able to turn them to her own benefit.

It was the second evening after his return, and poor Lucy was sinking rapidly. She was now so feeble that she was unable to speak except in gasping whispers, though her face never failed to light up at her husband's approach. The anxiety of Lascelles amounted to the most intense excitement, as he encountered the family physician in the hall and drew him aside—

"Doctor," he said, "my wife is very ill. I entreat you not to deceive me, but tell me the worst?"

"If you wish it, Mr. Lascelles," replied the physician, "I must answer you that I cannot conscientiously give you any hope."

"Do you think she will live through the night?"

The doctor shook his head. "I cannot say, I shall return in an hour and see if there is any change for the better."

Lascelles turned away. Guilt is ever suspicious of detection, and he durst not ask the same questions about the child. What could he do? It was too late to draw up a will, Lucy was manifestly incapable of signing one, his only hope rested on the chance that the infant would survive the night. With restless excitement he entered the darkened nursery and approached the child, who yet lingered between life and death, although its cries of pain had ceased from exhaustion, and its pulse was so feeble that it was almost imperceptible. With undisguised alarm Lascelles bent over it, asking, for the hundredth time—

"Is the baby alive, Margaret?"

"She is, sir," answered the woman. "You seem very anxious about her, sir."

"Yes, I am," replied Lascelles.

"A great deal sometimes comes to depend on a baby's life," said Margaret, sententiously; then, without appearing to notice his quick start, she went on: "I was once in a family, sir, where a great fortune was lost by a child being still-born, although the mother died in giving it birth."

Lascelles looked furtively at her. "Do you think she

will live till morning?" he asked, touching gently the emaciated infant.

"If you wish it very much, I think she will," rejoined the nurse significantly.

"She must," said Lascelles in a hoarse whisper.

"She *shall*."

Lascelles turned away, trembling from head to foot at his own temerity; he went back to the boudoir that communicated both with the nursery and his wife's apartment. Completely unnerved he walked restlessly up and down, yet shunned the approach to Lucy's room. The crime that he was tempted to commit against her, made him fear to meet her loving glance. Sometimes he paused for a moment to listen to the labored breathing, and then hurried away to the door of the other room where that imperturbable nurse sat bending over the quiet infant. There was something inexpressibly horrible in the slow stealing march of those long hours. The doctor came and went, the night waned, and yet all remained unchanged. Mrs. Hartly sat at Lucy's pillow, and Margaret cowered over the helpless babe. Still the mother lingered, and the daughter failed.

A great while had elapsed since midnight, and Lascelles judged that it must be almost morning, when approaching the nursery, he noticed it full of a soft red light. Entering immediately, he discovered that although it was close and warm, Margaret had lit a small fire in the grate, and was sitting quite near it with the child in her arms.

"What is the matter, nurse?" he asked in alarm.

"I am afraid the baby has a chill," replied the woman with a significant look, that curdled his blood. "I am trying to warm her."

Lascelles durst ask no more, though his heart sickened with a dreadful foreboding. He left the chamber and returned to his previous post of observation, perceiving with inexpressible relief that a dull grey light was stealing into the room; and a few indistinct sounds coming in through the open window, announced that the great city was awakening to another day. It was not long after this when Mrs. Hartly appeared at the door.

"Lucy is dying," she said, "come quickly."

With a shudder he obeyed her, entered his wife's room, and approached the bed. Her breath, which had before been so labored, had sunk into a faint sigh, her eyes were half open, and already over her features was stealing the livid hue of death. Yet even at that supreme moment, she knew her husband, a faint ray of expression flitted over her face, and her lips moved.

"Walter," she murmured, "dear husband—kiss me—once more."

Mrs. Hartly's eyes were fixed upon him, yet he could not repress a shiver of fear, as he bent down over the dying woman and pressed his lips to hers. It was but a brief instant, yet when he raised his head all was over. Her faithful spirit had fled in the effort of that last caress.

"She is dead," said Mrs. Hartly, coming forward and kissing her pale forehead. "Poor Lucy, she suffered much, but ere this she is beyond the reach of pain and illness for ever."

Lascelles durst not linger, but with a sigh almost of relief, hurried into the next room. He advanced eagerly. Margaret still sat before the fire with the child in her arms, murmuring a soft lullaby.

"Is she alive?" he asked hurriedly.

"Yes, sir," replied the nurse, "I think the little dear is better."

Lascelles shuddered at the mocking tenderness of the words, although somewhat relieved by the assurance they contained. At that moment Mrs. Hartly appeared in the doorway.

"Let me take the child," she said.

"Really, madam," replied Margaret, "she has just fallen asleep—I am afraid of disturbing her."

Mrs. Hartly looked hard at her, but did not dispute the point; she merely turned to Lascelles, who quailed beneath her searching look—

"My duty to the child is very strong," she said, "now that my care of the mother has ceased."

He stammered a reply, and she seated herself quietly near the nurse. The moments ticked slowly away. A morbid dreadful curiosity took possession of Lascelles to know if that was a living infant or a senseless corpse which the stony nurse caressed so tenderly. It was almost a relief to his tortured feelings, when at the end of perhaps half an hour Mrs. Hartly a second time approached her and said firmly—

"Give me that baby."

"Certainly, madam, if you insist, but, pray, take her carefully," replied Margaret, lifting her tiny burden. Mrs. Hartly raised it tenderly, then her eyes filled with tears.

"Alas! poor child!" she said, "it is dead, and, more," she added with a start, "it is cold!"

"It must be only a chill," replied Margaret, imperturbably. "I fed her just now, and she seemed better."

Mrs. Hartly did not reply; she carried the dead infant into the next room and laid it beside the dead mother. Then kneeling down she wept long and bitterly over the untimely fate of her unfortunate cousin.

As soon as the door closed upon her Lascelles advanced towards the nurse and asked in a low agitated whisper—

"When did it die?"

"About two hours ago, as near as I can judge," answered Margaret coolly, "though I kept it warm as long as I could." Then noticing his horror-struck looks she added: "But you need not concern yourself, sir, I will say just what you choose."

"Not now," said Lascelles, tremulously, "I cannot talk to you about it now. But do not speak to any one until I see you again."

He hurried away, and going to his room locked the door that he might not be disturbed in his deliberations. Juvenal says—"*Nemo repentè fuit turpissimus*," and notwithstanding all his vileness he could not at once bring himself to the commission of this crime. Yet the temptation to accept the woman's offer was immense. It was true that in no event could he lose the income of his wife's large property, and this might have satisfied him had he not already begun to dream of marrying the only woman he had ever loved. Relying upon the past, and fortified by his vanity, he had no doubt of succeeding in his suit; and, should he marry again, it would be extremely desirable that he should hold independent possession of the fortune. No one would know the real facts except this nurse and himself; and from his legal knowledge he was aware that, should all be discovered,

he would be liable to no punishment for this nameless crime. Over and over again he repeated this assurance. A thorough coward at heart, he was incapable of even a bold villainy, and might have been terrified from this act had he not been rendered secure by the strange absence of all legislation on this point. Then, once again, he thought of the wealth which he so longed to hold undisputed, and hesitating no longer determined to comply with any conditions that would insure a result so advantageous.

Fearing to trust his accomplice, as soon as he arrived at this conclusion Lascelles sent for Margaret. Their interview was a long one, for her demands were exorbitant, and it was some time before he would agree to them. At length, however, all was satisfactorily arranged, and sending for the legal gentleman who had been the confidential adviser of the late Mr. Wentworth, the woman in his presence declared that the child survived the mother at least half an hour.

When this was over, Lascelles breathed more freely, and was at length able to take the rest and repose he so much required, before making the arrangements for the solemnities of the ensuing day.

The procession that followed poor Lucy Lascelles to her grave was but a small one, for the weather was oppressively warm, and most of their friends were out of town. There was something touchingly sad in this double funeral—the little baby sleeping its last sleep on its mother's arm—as they lay side by side, in the same coffin. The melancholy train, creeping slowly on through the great thoroughfares, jostled by the streams of busy life, and surrounded by a careless and indifferent crowd.

It was an infinite relief when at last the quiet cemetery was reached, and the green trees and soft sky looked down calmly on the passing throng, and welcomed kindly these new tenants to their long resting-place.

CHAPTER XXV.

"Break! Break! Break!
At the foot of thy crags, oh sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me."

TENNYSON.

"The thoughts of past pleasures and truth
The best of our blessings below."

Dobson and Joan.—PRYOR.

MEDORA FIELDING left Lazy-Bank the day after Mr. Southwold's funeral. She was not able to leave sooner. On the homeward drive after her interview with Floyd, she had explained to Mrs. Clarkson in a few feeble words that her engagement was at an end.

"Broken off!" exclaimed her friend. "It must be a mere temporary misunderstanding."

"It is one which can never be removed," replied Medora. "I shall assign no reason for my conduct. Let the world say what it will."

Mrs. Clarkson asked no more questions. She saw that her companion was too weak to converse, and trusted to time to explain the mystery. On their arrival at Lazy-Bank, Medora went at once to her room. She felt like one walking in a dream, and almost immediately sank into a heavy stupor of sleep that lasted some hours.

When she awoke she was in a high fever. Her brain throbbed and ached intensely. She could not think calmly, and she was haunted by the horrible fear that she might become delirious, and betray all the secrets of her life. But she was endowed by nature with an iron constitution and vigorous health. These assisted her to throw off the threatened illness, and her powerful will enabled her to maintain a profound silence all through the second awful night of wakefulness and horror.

Towards morning she slept again, and when Mrs. Clarkson left for the funeral, she did not disturb her. On her return, she went at once to her friend's room. To her surprise, she found her sitting up, wrapped in a dressing-gown, very pale and exhausted, but temporarily without fever.

"My dear Medora, I am glad to see you so well. But are you not imprudent to be up?"

"No, Sue! I am very much better. I have been making some preparations for departure. I must leave to-morrow."

This announcement was met with much kind opposition, but Medora, who had a deeper reason than any she had chosen to give for not daring to linger, would listen to no arguments, replying to all that Mrs. Clarkson could say:

"My dear Sue, do not urge me to remain. It is impossible after what has passed," until she desisted from useless importunities.

The fever, which had for a few hours deserted Medora, returned towards evening, and the false strength which it gave to her, no doubt enabled her to complete her

arrangements for leaving, and accomplish her journey the following day.

It was a beautiful bright afternoon when Medora bade her friends adieu and entered the cars, which stood all black and grimy, enveloped in dust and smoke,—a sooty blot on the fair landscape. As they started, with a shriek and rush, a shudder crept over her at the thought of that other train that had swept on so relentlessly, and consummated her crime. She seated herself by an open window. As they dashed on she looked out on the sparkling river, and it seemed as if an eternity had elapsed since she last passed up those shores. She felt inexpressibly sick and bewildered; the latter part of the journey, she was conscious only of confused images, that swept by her, and of vainly endeavoring to converse with a casual acquaintance whom she encountered, and who surfeited her with compliments and admiration, mistaking the hectic flush on her cheeks for the glow of health, and the glittering light of her eyes for the lustre of animation.

Utterly wearied and dispirited, at last she reached her city home, those little rooms in a crowded street. To her there was no hope or prospect of comfort in the meeting with her mother. On the contrary, she shrank from it with positive dread.

Mrs. Fielding did not expect her daughter, who was never a good correspondent, and from whom she had not heard for more than a week. She was lying listlessly on the sofa, when the door opened and Medora entered. She sprang up.

"Good Heavens! Medora, how you startle me! Where did you come from?"

"From Lazy-Bank, of course."

"But what brought you back so soon? Why did you not write to me? You know how sensitive my nerves are. I shall be ill all day, in consequence of this shock."

"I shall regret exceedingly such a result of my unwelcome return."

"But you were to stay a month longer. Why are you here?"

"Because I have broken off my engagement with Mr. Southwold, and did not wish to remain."

"Broken your engagement! Really, Medora, you are the most inconsiderate girl. Here you have first set my heart palpitating with your unexpected arrival, and now you coolly announce to me a most disastrous piece of folly, without the slightest regard for my feelings. I had just begun to think that all my troubles about you were over, and here you must needs take some foolish fancy and break off your engagement, at the very time, too, when the match was most brilliant. I saw old Mr. Southwold's death in the paper, and thought everything was going on so well, and now here you are back. Oh, dear!" At this climax the lady fairly broke down and began to sob.

This was Medora's welcome. Heart-sick and body-sick, she turned away to seek the rest and refreshment she so much needed.

After this a week elapsed, miserably enough. Medora was not absolutely so ill as to be confined to her room, but every evening a low fever spread through her veins, and her nights were long hours of wakefulness and pain. And struggle against it fiercely as she might, those ter-

rible moments of bewilderment and haunting spectres recurred with alarming frequency. She felt keenly the mortification of her broken engagement, and scarcely quitted her room, in order to avoid the few friends and acquaintance, who yet remained in town, shrinking nervously from the surprised comments or awkward silence which was sure to follow the explanation of her unexpected return.

The sudden darkening of all the dreams of future happiness and peace she had indulged in contemplating her union with Floyd, and her remorseful recollection of the useless sacrifice of Mr. Southwold's life, were shadows that rendered each moment an unavailing regret. There was no danger of public disgrace; and in the prime of loveliness and fascination, she might yet look forward to years of triumph and ultimate success; but she felt that for her the future contained no hope.

Even the news of her poor friend Lucy's death, which took place two days after her return, failed to arouse her from the apathy of indifference. The time was passed when the freedom of Lascelles could benefit her. All the once ardent love had died into ashes. She remembered his ill-timed avowals with a shudder, and looked forward to the possibility of his renewed addresses without pleasure, almost with dread.

Mrs. Fielding was at last really alarmed by her daughter's wasted and wan look. Notwithstanding Medora's strenuous opposition, she ventured to consult a physician, who earnestly advised change of air, and that they should immediately leave the hot and dusty city and seek the sea-side.

Yielding to this necessity, Mrs. Fielding and her

daughter went at once to Seachester, the small watering-place where they were in the habit of whiling away the heats of August and early September. This village stood on the ocean shore of Long Island, and here they found cheap and comfortable lodgings in a small boarding-house.

The long tedious weeks of the summer slowly rolled away. Medora was very ill—more so than she was willing to admit to any one. The wretched fever that consumed her, still constantly recurred, and she was subject to appalling headaches, accompanied by the most complete bewilderment of brain. She shunned all society, absolutely fearing to see any one while she was in this state. She made her health an excuse for refusing to attend any of the parties of pleasure gotten up by the other sojourners at Seachester.

Almost her only occupation was to sit hour after hour on a lonely seat upon the beach, looking out over the waste of ocean, and watching the waves rolling up on the shore. Here she would remain often until the day faded into night, and the music of the band stationed in front of the great hotel, came floating over the waters. Forgetful of all around her, absorbed in yearning regrets over her past life, seemingly as widely separated from the awful present as if years instead of only months had elapsed since she was happy, she would think of those halycon days when she was young and fresh to life—a laughing careless girl, enjoying every moment of the glad hours, and drinking in the first intoxicating draught of admiration and devotion—the belle of every gay party, followed constantly by a crowd of worshipping adorers.

It is a glorious thing to be young and beautiful, to feel health and vigor bounding in every pulse, to dance to joyous music in brilliant ball-rooms, and listen to love whispers on moonlit balconies; to be everywhere and always the queen of the scene whose presence crowns the assemblage. Amid all the varied pleasures which a long life brings to the successful, there is none like this. Domestic happiness, affectionate children, unbounded luxury, triumphant fame—even in these enjoyments, delicious as they are, there lurks not the exquisite rapture which thrilled in those bright seasons when beauty first listened to love. Years may elapse, age may numb the feelings and chill the blood, but still some strain of music or some long forgotten name will awaken with passionate tenderness all the unutterably sad and unutterably sweet memories of the far past.

So Medora dwelt step by step on her brilliant career which had ended in misery. She saw herself coming gradually down the path of time, treading it with the white feet of innocent childhood; dancing gaily on, a happy girl; walking proudly as a loving woman; and now weighed down with crime, staggering blindly in darkness.

As she thought of the occurrences of the past eighteen months, she realized clearly how far greater were her chances of happiness with Southwold, than they ever were or could be with Lascelles. She believed now that had she been united to Floyd, she would have loved him with all the depth of affection of which her nature was capable, whereas with Lascelles the first freshness of her love was gone. She appreciated his unworthiness, and looked forward to a union with him as utterly impos-

sible. Indeed what right had she to hope for happiness? while ever across the brightest noon-tide as in the blackest night, floated the awful spectre of the murdered man. The present was utterly wretched, and the future she no longer dared to contemplate. There was a threatening horror in its look that curdled her veins with its coming dread.

For a long time she would not give it a name, even to herself, and with all the strength of her powerful will she struggled against the creeping shadow. Again and again she was fearfully conscious that she was not mistress of herself. It was this that made her shun companionship. Strange forms and imaginations, that could have no real existence but in a disordered brain, crept around her, and she would start up straining her eyes to convince herself that she was alone with the silent sunlight and the eternal sea.

At last the thought suggested itself that her efforts might be vainly made against an hereditary taint. There was something so awful in this fear, that for days she lacked the courage to ask the question which might prove its groundlessness or its hopeless certainty. Finally, the torturing suspense seemed harder to bear than the fatal knowledge, and she abruptly turned to Mrs. Fielding and said—

"Mother, has there ever been insanity in our family?"

"Really, Medora, what strange questions you do ask!"

"Never mind that, please, but answer me."

"I don't see why you wish to know, but I suppose I might as well tell you. Among the Clintons there never has been any transmitted disease, but after

I was married I discovered that your father's mother died in a lunatic asylum."

"Then I am mad!" Medora whispered the terrible words to herself, and went out to wander with restless steps on the lonely shore.

In that sentence was the curse of a blasted life, and while she could yet think coherently she contemplated her awful doom.

A blasted life! This inestimable boon of existence, which is given but once, rendered a curse instead of a blessing! Oh! measureless misery! to know that all possibility of happiness in this world is fled, and to have no hope of that future heaven where the clouded reason is brightened with eternal glory, and the wretchedness endured here, atoned for with endless bliss.

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Oh! she was changed,
As by the sickness of the soul; her mind
Had wandered from its dwelling, and her eyes
They had not their own lustre, but the look,
Which is not of the earth."

The Dream.—BYRON.

NOT without many struggles did Medora yield to her inevitable fate, although other conversations with her mother concerning her unfortunate ancestress, forced upon her, with appalling certainty, the hopelessness of her efforts. All that human skill could do she determined should be done, and thus reluctantly brought herself to the resolution of consulting a physician.

The person whom she selected as her adviser was Dr. Talbot, a venerable and kind old gentleman with whom she had, for two seasons past, some slight acquaintance. He had almost entirely retired from the practice of his profession, and now resided permanently in Seachester. Having much leisure, and being blessed with vigorous health, and fond of exercise in the open air, he was in the habit of taking long strolls over the hills and on the shore.

During these expeditions he frequently noticed the beautiful girl who sat motionless on her lonely seat, or paced with restless steps up and down a short distance,

turning ever at a certain point and walking fiercely back to her original starting-place, as if she were confined within barriers, instead of at liberty to wander away for miles. Watching her with kindly interest, that was deepened by a half suspicion which sometimes suggested itself, he more than once found Medora's flashing eyes fixed upon him with questioning earnestness. On these occasions he ventured to lift his hat and pass on with a courteous bow.

Satisfied by this that he had not forgotten her, and instinctively appreciating his benevolent character, Medora only awaited an opportunity for addressing him. It came one morning when she saw him advancing along the shore, and felt her brain unusually clear and her pulses cool. As he approached, she rose to meet him, and said, with all her old grace of manner—

"Good morning, Dr. Talbot. May I venture to ask you the favor of giving me some advice, or would you prefer not?"

"On the contrary, Miss Fielding; nothing will give me greater pleasure than to assist you in any way."

He seated himself beside her, and banishing the almost unconquerable repugnance she felt to giving words to her apprehensions, Medora began:

"I have noticed you pass here very frequently, and have sometimes fancied that you looked at me with interest."

"You are not mistaken. I have regarded you with much solicitude, regretting that one so young and so fitted to adorn society should so seclude herself."

"If you have watched me with such kindness, has it never suggested itself to you that there might be a

deeper and more awful reason than any the world gives for my conduct?" Then, as Dr. Talbot hesitated a reply, she added: "Do not fear to wound me by your answer, but tell me the truth, I entreat you."

"Yes! Miss Fielding, I have imagined that you were allowing yourself to brood too much on some harassing thought."

"And that it had affected my brain—is it not so?" she said excitedly.

"Not yet, I hope," rejoined the doctor, soothingly. "But do not dwell too much on your sorrow, whatever it is. You are young. Life has much happiness yet in store for you."

Medora shook her head. "No!" she said, sadly; "no! none!"

"My dear young lady, do not say so. Perhaps the state of your health has much to do with your depressed spirits. Let me feel your pulse. You have fever now—"

"I know it," replied Medora; "I am rarely free from it."

"Indeed! that is bad. And your head?"

"Oh! the most intense pain in it constantly. Often as if red-hot needles were thrust into my brain." And then she added, in a low voice, "I see the most horrible sights. I know they are not real, but I cannot throw them off."

Dr. Talbot regarded her compassionately. "Poor child!" he said, "you should not indulge such fancies."

"What chance do you think I have of resisting them when I tell you that there is hereditary insanity in our family."

She looked at him earnestly as she spoke, and detected instantly the sorrowful regret of his glance. "There is no hope? is it not so?"

"By no means, Miss Fielding; you are young, and while there is life there is no reason to despair."

"It will not kill me, then? I shall live?"

"Certainly, your life is in no danger. I think this fever will pass off in a few months—"

"When the struggle has ceased, and I am wholly crazy? I understand," interrupted Medora, quickly, "so there is no hope of death. I am young, as you say. My health has always been vigorous. I shall live! Live to curse my existence behind the horrid bars of a lunatic asylum! Live as long as my grandmother did! Do you know," she added in a half-whisper, "she became insane when she was only thirty, and lived to be seventy? Forty years in a mad-house! More than half her life! Forty years of unutterable horror and despair! And you tell me, as an encouragement, that this dreadful disease does not threaten my life."

She rose, as she spoke, and walked rapidly away a few steps, then abruptly returned to the seat. Her hat had fallen off. Her golden hair, now never arranged with the nice care she had been wont to bestow upon it, escaped from its confinement in a hundred twining curls. Her face was very pale, except for the round red spot in either cheek, and there was that glassy glitter in her eyes whose fatal significance the doctor understood only too well. He was much interested and touched, and pursuing the course which he conscientiously believed to be right, he took her hand and said, earnestly—

"Miss Fielding, you voluntarily solicited my advice. Let me give it to you honestly and sincerely. I will not deny that you are in much danger, though I am not without hope that it may be averted. But, in this hour of trial, let me entreat you to throw all your sorrows on that God who does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men."

Medora looked at him for a moment, as if not clearly comprehending him, then her lips curled contemptuously.

"No! no!" she said, "even if I implicitly believed in an overruling Providence, after having disregarded and slighted its precepts all through my bright days, now that my life is clouded with despair, I will not creep like a whipped hound on my knees, and pour out those prayers and homage in my misery I never uttered in my joy. No! if God has cursed my existence with this awful fate, suffering shall not extort from me the worship which happiness could not win."

Doctor Talbot was both shocked and hurt. He could not forbear sternly asking the unhappy woman—"Are you willing to meet that death, which sooner or later must come, with such blasphemous words upon your lips?"

"Yes!" replied Medora, wildly. "Yes! I would gladly die at once. No future terrors can appal me half so much as the ancestral doom that overshadows me."

She felt herself becoming confused, and added hastily, while she pressed her hand to her forehead, with a weary gesture:

"Forgive me; I did not intend to wound you. I

thank you for your kindness. Forgive me, for I am very wretched!"

She turned, and before the kind physician could detain her, ran with a strange gliding swiftness down the shore, until a huge sandhill hid her from view. Then she sank down on the hard beach, and all remembrance of the past, and all thought for the future, was merged in the torturing present. Her head was pierced with the most agonizing pain. Her brain was full of the wildest and most distorted fancies. She lay there, uttering no sound, except occasionally a low moan, only swaying herself restlessly from side to side, through all the slow lapsing hours of the summer day. Unheeded, the ardent sun poured down his scorching beams on her unprotected head. The tide rose and fell beside her, although at its highest point the curling surf almost reached the spot where she rested. Her beautiful hair was tangled with the clinging sand. Her pure white robe was soiled and disordered—and she, always so scrupulously neat in her dress, so proudly graceful in her motions, lay there unheeding her disarranged attire and stained garments. It was well for her that no strange foot approached the spot where she lay, and that only the eye of that God whom she had outraged, beheld her misery.

It was not noon when the attack came upon her, and the last slant rays of the sun were crimsoning the waves when she recovered her lost sanity. Rising up she looked wildly about her, and gradually remembered all that had occurred. A blush of shame flushed her forehead as she noticed her dishevelled hair and dress, and thought with acute mortification of the possibility of

having been seen by any one during her long unconsciousness. Her first care was to satisfy herself upon this point. To her inexpressible relief she saw that there were no foot-prints in the sand, save the tiny marks of her own wandering steps. Satisfied by this, she bound up her hair, arranged her dress carefully, and walked rapidly back to the house.

All the way home she was pondering the morning's conversation and her subsequent temporary derangement. She had never before had so violent an attack, and she shuddered with inexpressible agony at the thought of that future time when she should never have one moment of calm, coherent thought, and when all her dignity and modesty would yield to the fatal disease. Remembering what the physician had said, and realizing her own yet superabundant vitality, only one means of escape suggested itself, from the long years of misery her ancestress endured, and this was—to die at once.

With desperate courage she contemplated this alternative. As she passed on, she cast a questioning glance at the cold waters that broke beside her, but she was a strong swimmer; in by-gone days she had rejoiced to struggle successfully with the bounding waves. Death by that means would not be easily obtained, and she remembered with disgust all the horrible details of the discovery of a drowned corpse—the bruised and discolored limbs of the half-naked body exposed to the rude gaze of curious eyes.

"No! no!" she murmured, "I must die; young as I am, that is my only hope; but, oh! not so! not so!"

While she was yet sane she determined to mature a

plan of action that might, as far as possible, rob her death of its physical terrors, give it the appearance of a natural catastrophe, and cheat the world of its wondering gossip over so strange a suicide.

Arrived at the house she found her mother in hysterics from anxiety. She was obliged to satisfy her inquiries with a hasty tale of a dinner at a distant farm-house. As she uttered the words Medora loathed the falsehood, but she was extremely desirous to keep her mother as long as possible in ignorance of the true nature of her disease. Of course Mrs. Fielding saw and lamented her daughter's wasted form and fading beauty, but attributed it to mortification at the broken engagement, which time would soothe and renewed triumphs cure. It was, therefore, a never-ceasing cause of querulous complaint that Medora persisted in shunning society.

Fearing the peevish remonstrances which her long absence would certainly call forth, under the plea of fatigue Medora hastened to retire to her little chamber. There, seated at the open window, she gazed wearily on the beautiful world whose loveliness would soon fall on horror-struck senses, without the power of soothing their madness or calming their excitement with its unchangeable serenity.

As she looked out, the moon was riding high in the heavens, while below her lay the grey beach and the dark waters of the restless ocean, flashing for an instant in the silver light then dying in foaming surf on the shore. Far out at sea a great ship loomed ghostly in the moonbeams, and in the distant horizon the sea and sky mingled dimly into one.

There is always something sad and solemn in such a

scene, whose mysterious significance is vaguely hymned in the eternal moan of the expiring waves. As she listened to that ceaseless murmur and looked up at that pale moon whose origin and destruction no human being can guess or foretell, over Medora's soul rushed all those fearful questions that in this world must for ever remain unanswered. What Omniscient Being marked out and watched over her devious career? What Eternal Power, after having cursed her life with utter despair, threatened her with yet worse terrors should she dare to release herself from present misery by her own act?

Never rightly instructed, or kindly taught that the Great All-Father is a God of Love, in this awful hour of trial, no hope suggested itself to the wretched girl, but to escape from the fate that threatened her, by blindly rushing into that unknown future that exists in the fathomless eternity. All fear of the hopeless torment which there awaits the lost soul, and indeed almost all remembrance of the crime that rendered that punishment inevitable, was merged in the more tangible horror of the stony walls of a madhouse. With fierce desperation she rebelled against her inexorable fate, and impiously dared to curse God and die!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"Love is no more such than Seraphs' hymns are discord,
And such is no more Love than Ætna's breath is summer."
Proverbial Philosophy.—TUPPER.

"Loathsome are life's hours!
Laughing shall I die!"
KRÁKUMÁL.

To Lascelles the long bright summer dragged on week after week with tedious weariness. He was haunted with constant fears that by some accident he might yet lose his ill-gotten wealth. His wife's relations preserved an ominous silence, never having in any way questioned his right to the property he claimed, and he was annoyed by constant visits from Margaret. Not having sufficient nerve to defy her, he was completely in her power. Her rapacity knew no bounds; and in order to satisfy her, he gave her not only large sums of money, but actually descended to the meanness of bestowing upon her, at her demand, various articles of his dead wife's dress and ornaments. Even after all this he had no confidence in her fidelity, and, therefore, durst not leave town. He lingered there all through July and August, endeavoring vainly to forget his troubles in the various dissipations which a city at that season affords.

At length the plan suggested itself of persuading Margaret to return to Europe. He only succeeded in effecting this by a large outlay of money; but finally he had the satisfaction of seeing her passage taken in the steamer, and all the arrangements for her departure complete. Vastly relieved to be entirely free from this anxiety, his thoughts reverted with renewed ardor to their old channel, and he determined once more to visit Medora. He turned his back upon the city with a lighter heart than he had known for months, and one fine September afternoon arrived at Seachester.

As soon as he was established in a room at the great hotel, he sallied forth in search of the boarding-house where he knew he should find Medora and her mother. Sending up a card, in a few moments Mrs. Fielding entered the parlor. After exchanging the ordinary common-places of civility, she informed him that her daughter was on the beach, and indicated as well as she was able the lonely seat where she was generally to be found. After receiving this information, Lascelles lingered but a short time, leaving as soon as politeness permitted, and Mrs. Fielding saw him depart with considerable satisfaction; for, in her eyes, the wealthy widower was a very different person from the poor young lawyer who had wooed her daughter eighteen months before.

A rapid walk soon brought him in sight of the designated spot. He saw a graceful figure seated on a rude bench, and something in the air and attitude at once informed him that it was she whom he sought.

The sun had set over the distant waves, and earth and sea were bathed in a tender, ruby light. All necessity for

protection from his ardent rays having ceased, Medora had thrown off the broad-brimmed hat which she wore. It had been a sultry day; her drapery was thin, her mantle had fallen from her shoulders, and her face and neck were shaded only by the masses of her golden hair. In that ruddy glow, with her sad gaze fixed on the dying sunset, she was mournfully beautiful as the fair Eurydice, when she watched with melancholy patience at the crimson portals of inexorable hell.

A week had elapsed since Medora's interview with Dr. Talbot, and she was herself painfully conscious of the rapid failure of her intellect. Already in her own mind her days were numbered, and she sat there, her fingers playing idly with a little dagger she had recently purchased, her heart full of desperate regrets over her blasted hopes, when her profound reverie was broken by a voice calling her name—

"Medora!"

She sprang up startled, and beside her stood the only man she had ever loved. With a wild cry she staggered forward, and for one brief instant was locked in his arms. Then, with remembered dignity, she drew back, and for the first time Lascelles clearly saw all the ravages which the past three months had made in that once peerless woman. Was this the beautiful girl whose form was rounded to perfect grace, whose face glowed with health and intellect? This pale being, thin to attenuation, with half-uncurled ringlets clinging to her bare shoulders, whose plump softness was all gone! Her cheeks and lips colorless and wan, and those wonderful eyes, now unnaturally large, burning with dazzling

brilliance as if lighted by a consuming fire! Inexpressibly shocked, Lascelles exclaimed:

"Good God! Medora, have you been ill?"

"Yes," she replied, "since I last saw you I have suffered more than I can tell. I did not expect to meet you again, but since you are come it is well. Sit beside me."

"For ever, dearest," he replied, seating himself, and endeavoring to encircle her waist with his arm. Medora drew back—

"No, Walter! That cannot be. There was a time when I would gladly have been yours, but it is too late now. Your falsehood has been fatal."

"Do not be too cruel with me," said Lascelles, entreatingly, "you know I was driven to it. After all it has ended well, for now I can give you that wealth without which we could neither of us have been content."

Medora made a gesture of impatience. "No need of excuses now," she repeated. "I tell you, you woo me too late! too late!"

"Dearest Medora, do not say that; you must forgive me, and we will yet be happy together."

"No, Walter, that will *never* be. I have been very ill, I cannot marry you, nor will you wish it when you know what is the fatal malady that is killing me."

"What do you mean?" cried Lascelles, much startled.

"Can you not guess?" she asked sadly, as she rose and stood before him. "You see how I am changed; now look at me well, note my wasted figure, and my wild eyes. Do you not read my awful doom?" Then, as he did not reply, she added solemnly, "I will interpret it for you, then. Walter Lascelles! I am mad!"

Standing there in the fading light with white garments, long fair hair, and gleaming eyes, she looked so strange and unearthly that he felt an absolute conviction of the truth of her words. Horrified, he stammered:

"No, no! you are excited, you cannot mean *that*. Do try to be calm."

Medora reseated herself. "I will endeavor to be," she answered more quietly, "but now you realize that you are indeed too late!"

"Perhaps you only imagine it," said Lascelles evasively, then, remembering the scene at Southwold, he added, "You let your thoughts dwell too much upon the past."

"Do you think I can forget it?" she asked fiercely. "No, it will haunt me for ever and for ever!"

"My dear Medora, you should endeavor to throw off such imaginations, try change of air and scene; you will yet be well."

"No, Walter, no possibility of that! I have not yet told you the worst. This insanity is hereditary, the poison that fires my blood and maddens my brain is inherited from a crazed ancestress."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Lascelles, "is there then no hope?"

"None!" replied Medora, sadly; then taking his hand, she added, "now that you know my fate, of course you will yield to our inevitable separation; but yet once more, let me, if I can, forget the threatening future in the present."

Alas! poor subterfuge of a frenzied fancy! She said this with a desperate recklessness, hoping to cheat herself once more with the belief in a vanished happiness,

never imagining that the words and the willingness with which she resigned herself to his offered embrace, would suggest to Lascelles' base heart a purpose too unutterably vile for expression. As he pressed his lips to hers he murmured softly—

"You love me, darling?"

That word, pronounced in that tone, awakened all the tender memories of the past, and never dreaming of danger, Medora yielded with rapturous ardor to that last caress. They were alone with the whispering ocean and the deserted shore, and the soft hush of twilight fell gently around them in those passionate moments of silence and love.

Suddenly Medora tore herself from those clinging arms, and started to her feet, her cheeks flushed, her eyes flashing.

"Walter Lascelles! I had forgotten that you were selfish and treacherous; you have reminded me of it. I gave that embrace not to what you are, but to the lost ideal I once loved!"

With trembling lips he sprang towards her and endeavored to clasp her once more. Medora drew herself up haughtily.

"What!" she cried, "You would dare to touch me again? Stand back!" then as he still advanced, she raised her arm, and the fading light concentrated flashed from the narrow blade of her tiny dagger. "Stand back, I say!" she added, fiercely, "do you see this? It is a tiny weapon, but remember it is in the hand of a maniac!"

At her frenzied words and menacing gesture, Lascelles, a thorough dastard at heart, slunk off terrified.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Medora, wildly. "*Afraid!* Oh, false-hearted coward! I loathe myself that I ever loved you! I thank you for having broken the last spell that bound me to you. I shall die the happier for having no regrets!"

As she uttered the last words, she waved her hand, witheringly contemptuous, as the fair Brynhild, when the craven Viking came to claim the reward of his crime; and, as with desperate purpose she faded from her lover's eyes, so Medora, with fluttering garments and floating hair, disappeared in darkness.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"O jours, jours de douleur, de silence et d'effroi!"

Jocelyn.—LAMARTINE.

"Quisque suos patimur Manes."

VIRGIL.

WHEN Medora had walked some distance, and was beyond all possibility of pursuit, she paused. She felt that same strange sensation creeping over her brain, and knew only too well that another of those fearful attacks was coming on. With a shudder she drew the little dagger again from its sheath; it was a tiny, weak affair, which she had purchased with the resolution of never being without the means of freeing herself from suffering, but at the same time she did not intend to use it except under extreme circumstances, as death by that means would tell only too plainly its own horrible tale.

In her reflections upon the one subject that now engrossed all her thoughts, a far better plan had suggested itself: one which, if she could put it in execution, would prevent all suspicion of the true cause of her death. Now feeling that her self-control was rapidly deserting her, she determined no longer to delay her

preparations, and nerving herself to her task she subdued her excited feelings into staid dignity of deportment.

On reaching the village she went at once to a small apothecary's shop, and entering with apparent indifference she made her purchase unquestioned. As she came out into the increasing gloom she tore the yet moist label from the phial she had bought, and rolling it into a shapeless mass flung it away. Then hastening on, she entered the house by a side door, and went at once to her room.

Arrived there, she carefully concealed the bottle, and threw herself on the bed, putting the dagger under her pillow. A moment after she called a servant and sent for her mother. All this she had done by a desperate effort of will, never pausing for thought, and, indeed, almost incapable of it. The pain in her head was increasing fearfully, yet she controlled herself sufficiently, when Mrs. Fielding entered much alarmed by her hasty summons, to say in a steady voice:

"I am very ill, mother; I am going to have one of my terrible headaches. Send for Dr. Talbot: he will attend me; and let no one besides yourself, but him, approach me."

She spoke coherently though very rapidly, for even as the last syllables passed her lips a rushing sound filled her brain, all consciousness left her, and she sank into a bewilderment of agony.

Three days elapsed, three dreadful days of unutterable anguish. Hour after hour the wretched woman suffered and endured, lying there in her darkened chamber, with her once noble intellect shattered, her

once beautiful face distorted with pain. All that could be done to alleviate her sufferings was done by Dr. Talbot, who watched over her with the kindest care; and his efforts were rewarded, for it was he who caught the first ray of returning intellect when, at the close of the third day, Medora opened her eyes, calm, and, in a measure, free from pain. She smiled sweetly as she caught his look fixed upon her with anxious solicitude, and said faintly:

"I am quite collected, Doctor. I knew you would come to see me."

"Certainly, my dear young lady. I am sincerely glad that you are at last better."

"How long have I been ill?"

"It is three days since the attack came on."

"Three days, and it has not killed me!" she moaned, then glancing quickly around the apartment, and seeing that accidentally there was no one there but the kind physician, she asked, in a low tone, "Have I raved much?"

"No! not a great deal, I think; but you are talking more than you should; let me call your mother, she will be glad to see you once again yourself."

"What!" exclaimed Medora, "does she suspect what is the matter with me?"

"No," replied the doctor, "I think not. She tells me that since your childhood the slightest fever has been accompanied by delirium, and she attributes your illness solely to that. Poor lady! she is quite worn out with three nights of watching, and has gone now to take a little rest." He moved towards the door, but Medora hastily detained him.

"Stop one moment, please; I should like to say a few words to you, now, while I have the opportunity."

The doctor paused. "Be careful not to over-exert yourself," he said, kindly.

Replying to this warning only by an impatient gesture, Medora asked—

"Is there no possibility of such suffering developing a disease of the heart?"

"I think not; I see no danger of it."

"May it not kill me by a sudden congestion, or some such affection of the brain?"

"I hope not, but, my dear young friend, you *must* not indulge such fancies."

Without heeding the reproof, Medora continued—

"If you found me dead to what would you attribute my death?"

"It would depend upon circumstances," replied Doctor Talbot. "But you are becoming excited, I cannot allow you to talk thus."

Medora looked at him earnestly, and in the steady light of her clear eyes there was very little appearance of a wandering intellect, as she said—

"Only one word more, and I have done; first, to thank you for your kindness, and then to beg you, if you ever are summoned to my aid too late, to let the secret of my disease and my death die with me."

"Miss Fielding," replied Doctor Talbot, rising, "I am unable to comprehend the full meaning of what you say, but I warn you that I shall consider it my duty to tell your mother that you should not be permitted to be much alone. As for your desire that your threatened malady shall remain unknown, I sympathize with

it fully, and you may rest assured that I shall not be the first to divulge it. Allow me to summon Mrs. Fielding."

He left the room, and Medora sank back upon the pillow, a good deal exhausted with the effort of so long a conversation. Her busy brain, restored to coherent action, was full of plans and thoughts; she had no intention of complying with the physician's repeated injunctions as to the absolute necessity for quiet. This was the time for exertion, and not for tranquillity.

That same evening, finding herself alone with her mother, she turned to her and said—

"Mamma, please come and sit beside me, I have something I wish to say to you."

"My dear, the doctor said you should not talk much," replied Mrs. Fielding, approaching the bed.

"I know it, mamma, but I may not again be so well able to speak as I am now."

"Do not say so, Medora; you are already better, you will soon be well."

"No, mamma, I am afraid not; I have been so ill that death stares me in the face."

"My dear child!" exclaimed Mrs. Fielding, "do not say such frightful words, the doctor does not consider you in any danger."

"I do not wish to pain you," replied Medora, "I have already caused you so much anxiety; it is true I may recover, but if I should not, dear mamma, promise to forget all my wayward selfishness, and to remember only that I always loved you, and that I have been very unhappy."

Mrs. Fielding began to sob. "You terrify me by talking thus, Medora; you know that I am bound up in you, and you make me miserable by such strange speeches."

"You need not distress yourself so much," answered Medora kindly; and anxious to relieve her mother's mind, she added, "I am sure I shall be better to-morrow."

Mrs. Fielding did not catch the look which accompanied these words, or she would not have felt so much reassured. Drying her eyes, she replied:

"Not if you agitate yourself so, my dear; you must not say another word, but try to sleep."

Medora replied, by entreating her mother not to think of sitting up with her that night, but to leave her in charge of the maid, who had offered to watch, and herself seek the repose she so much required. Yielding at length to her daughter's entreaties, Mrs. Fielding, after seeing everything arranged for her comfort, and giving Mary many earnest directions, leaned down to bid Medora good night. With strange wistful fondness, she clung around her mother's neck, kissing her again and again, until Mrs. Fielding said—

"If you would rather have me with you, my dear, only say so."

"No! no," replied Medora, releasing her hold, "I require no assistance. I am sure I shall sleep. Good night."

So her mother left the room, and with a long sigh Medora closed her eyes in well-feigned slumber.

Mary sat for some time watching the tranquil figure

on the bed; then she began to think how hard it would be to keep awake all night, and at last—youth is careless, and nature is powerful,—she sank down in a profound sleep.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"How ended she?
With horror madly dying, like her life,
Which being cruel to the world, concluded
Most cruel to herself."

Cymbeline.—SHAKESPEARE.

MEDORA remained perfectly quiet, until the regular breathing of the tired girl assured her that she was asleep. Then she opened her eyes and slowly raised herself in bed; her first act was to slide her hand under the pillow—the dagger was gone. Her lip curled with a weary contempt, as she murmured—

"It is as well so, they will be the more entirely deceived."

Then very gradually she drew herself into a sitting posture, the candle-light flickered on her pale face, her long disordered hair and white garments giving her an appearance of unearthly beauty, as she paused for a moment from sheer weakness. Her head swam, and had she not leaned against the side of the bed, she would have fallen.

"Courage!" she whispered. "I shall not suffer long!"

As she spoke, she stepped on the floor with tiny bare feet. The doctor had said truly she had great vigor of constitution. She rallied all her strength, and

with a mighty effort seemed to fling off every weakness, as she rose up firmly, and glided noiselessly across the room. On the shelf where she had placed it stood the small phial, containing a thick, dark fluid. There was an awful stealthiness in her motions, as with a hand which no longer trembled, Medora took it down. For an instant a shiver crept over her, as she held it up to the light.

"Death!" she murmured, "liquid death in this nauseous draught! Fool! why do I shudder; is not an endless sleep better than a frenzied life! Come, let me drink it then, and drink it gaily, in memory of the past."

With a strange smile she raised the glass to her lips, and unflinchingly, with resolute brow, drop by drop swallowed all its bitter contents. When it was empty she drew a long breath.

"Ah, well!" she sighed. "It is all over now; the final act of my life's tragedy is performed; it only remains to cheat the world for the last time. Quick, then, before the fatal lethargy creeps over me."

With steady hand she threw some water into the bottle, and after cleansing it thoroughly, replaced it on the shelf. The cork, which had scarcely touched its contents, she tore in two, and tossed it through the open window. As she did this, she paused for one moment, and looked out. In the east the old moon, now in her last quarter, was struggling to rise above the clouds which shrouded the horizon; the unlit ocean was black and stormy, and the surf fell with a sullen roar.

"The moon is waning, like my life," she said, wildly,

" and the night is as dark as my fate! Oh, it is hard to die thus, and so young! to bid this beautiful world, my home and my friends, a last farewell! But I linger too long; already a strange drowsiness creeps over me. I said well, I shall sleep to-night—to-night and for ever!"

With a quick glance at the still slumbering girl, she crept back to bed. Beside her on a table stood an *odeur* casket; taking out the bottle which contained Cologne, she moistened her lips with it, and bathed her hands and brow in the powerful perfume. Then, with instinctive dignity and modesty, she arranged her dress carefully, and swept back her golden curls. All was done, she crossed her hands quietly on her breast, and her lips parted in the happiest smile that had gleamed there for months, as she whispered softly:

" Now have I not expiated that old man's death? I no longer see his haunting frown. God knows how much I have suffered; and if He is indeed a God of mercy, perhaps I may yet find happiness and peace in that world beyond the stars!"

Her eyes closed; a creeping lethargy clouded her brain and checked her pulses; paler and paler grew her beautiful face, until when the moon rising above the clouds, shed its beams on that fair form, there was that in its rigid outlines and changeless serenity that told, with hopeless certainty, that she slept the sleep of death!

Death! O eternal mystery! Alas! that one so young should rashly dare, with presumptuous feet, to cross its threshold unsummoned! Alas! that one so gifted should have been driven by a frenzied brain to commit this desperate act! Alas! that one so beautiful

should be self-condemned, to leave this fair world to rest in an unhallowed grave!

The long night passed slowly on in that silent room, whose stillness was broken only by the chime of the waves, sounding ever like a wailing dirge. The candle flickered and flared in its socket, and at last went out, just as the moon's light, before she had run half her course, was quenched in the coming day.

Refreshed by a few hours' sleep the watcher awoke, and was greatly relieved to find her charge still reposing. With careful hand she drew the curtains, lest the too brilliant light might disturb her. Vain precaution! the most dazzling sun that ever shone would be powerless to break that everlasting slumber.

As the morning passed on Mrs. Fielding's first pleasure at her daughter's tranquil night and late rest, was changed to such anxiety as made her send in all haste for Doctor Talbot. He came quickly, in answer to her summons, and entered with her the darkened room that was yet fragrant with the powerful scent of cologne. He bent down over that quiet figure, and then with horror-struck haste tore back the curtains from the window and let in the glorious flood of autumn sunlight.

It fell in a shower of bright rays on the snowy robe that veiled that exquisite form, lighting up the clear pallor of her faultless complexion, gleaming on those full lips, yet parted in a happy smile, and transforming her yellow ringlets into gold. But all this beauty was ghastly to look upon, for no gentle respirations heaved that swelling bosom, and the half open eyes were utterly expressionless and dead.

"Why does she not wake?" asked Mrs. Fielding, in a low frightened whisper.

"Madam," replied Doctor Talbot, compassionately, "Try to remember that God is infinitely good, although he has sent upon you this great affliction. Your daughter never will wake again!"

CHAPTER XXX.

"Ως γὰρ ἐπεκλώσαντο Θεοὶ δειλοῖσι βροτοῖσι
Ζώειν ἀχνυμένοις.

The true cause of Medora's death was never known. If Doctor Talbot had any suspicions he wisely kept them locked in his own breast. As she had wished, the secret of her malady and its sequel died with her. There is something very sad in the untimely fate of one so young; and long afterwards many a bright face in a gay ball-room was clouded by the passing remembrance of that graceful figure that would never again lead the dance, that silvery laugh that was hushed for ever!

Upon Mrs. Fielding the effect of the sudden destruction of all the fond hopes and proud anticipations that centred around her daughter, was most disastrous. Indeed she never fully recovered from the shock. It was the affliction, above all others, most calculated to wring her frivolous character to its very depths.

Mrs. Clarkson heard the sad news with a passionate burst of grief, for a whole seasonabsolutely refusing to be comforted.

As for Lascelles, he suffered as deeply from Medora's loss, as was possible for one of his selfish nature. But little time was allowed him for indulging his sorrow.

Very soon every faculty was absorbed in a new anxiety. On his return to the city, he learned that the nurse Margaret had indeed sailed for England, but before her departure she turned her secret to yet further account by selling it for the last time to the nearest male relative of the late Mr. Wentworth. From her information, coupled with the corroborative proof that Mrs. Hartly was able to give, his deception was discovered. Indeed, on being questioned, his assertions were so confused and contradictory, that, with his pale face and frightened looks, they were but assurances of his guilt.

By an accident the whole disgraceful history became public, and Lascelles was everywhere treated with the coldness and contempt he so well deserved. No need to follow him further. It is easy to guess where the career of one so cowardly and so utterly lost to all sense of honor must inevitably end.

* * * * * * * * *

In his beautiful home on the Hudson, seated in the very room where he had first heard her name, Floyd Southwold read this announcement.

"Died at Seachester, September 18th, MEDORA, only child of the late CAPT. RICHARD FIELDING. Aged 20."

With a desperate spasm of the heart he dropped the paper, and hid his face in his hands. At that moment all was forgotten, but that he once loved her, and her image rushed to his memory fair as when he first saw her radiant with health and beauty so surpassingly lovely that involuntarily his whole soul was full of worshipping admiration.

The shock was almost as great as if she had been torn from his side while he could yet claim her as his own. Ignorant of the true cause of her early death, he trusted wiht lenient tenderness that it had expiated her faults and her crimes, and no longer struggled against the haunting remembrance.

His had been a faithful and absorbing passion, and it was long ere he recovered from its effects. But at last the first stunning sorrow passed away, and he was enabled once more to resume the tranquil occupations of his quiet life.

In that future which lies bright before him, he may yet find happiness in a calmer love, and as he goes down the path of life, new pleasures and successes may surround his steps. But ever in his most joyous moments memory will turn with yearning regrets to those golden hours when he first wooed Medora; all other forms of beauty must fade before the remembered loveliness of that peerless woman, over whose untimely fate his heart with passionate tenderness ever murmurs a mournful lament.

THE END.

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